





# ADMIRAL BLAKE

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# ADMIRAL BLAKE

DAVID HANNAY

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## *BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.*

The authorities for the life of Blake are scanty and of dubious value. He is, of course, frequently mentioned in the Calendar of State Papers (Domestic), 1649-57, but the references to him are in a great majority of cases purely official and of little interest. Other mention of him is to be found in Rushworth, Thurloe, and the compilers and memoir-writers of the time. In Thurloe are some of his despatches, and of the orders sent him when on foreign service in his later years.

An account of the first battle of the Dutch war was published by authority under the title of 'The Answer of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England to three Papers delivered in to the Council of State by the Lords Ambassadors Extraordinary of the States-General of the United Provinces'. It gives the English version of the preliminaries of the encounter, and may be compared with the Dutch story as told in the life of Cornelius Van Tromp, Martin's son and successor.

There are also official or semi-official 'Narratives' of the capture of the Plate ships, and of the attack on Santa Cruz, published by authority.

No life of the admiral was written till nearly half a century after his death. In 1704 one appeared in a collection of 'Lives English and Foreign'. It was an attempt to supply a want with indifferent means. When

the reaction against Walpole's policy had brought on the war of Jenkins' Ear, and there was a revival of interest in the old naval glories of the country, two lives, by very different hands, were written to meet the popular demand. Dr. Johnson turned the life of the collection into good English. His short biography has, of course, an independent literary value, but it does not pretend to be an original authority.

About the same time there appeared 'A History and Life' professing to be the work of a gentleman bred in the family. It was manifestly written in Grub Street while Vernon's capture of Portobello was a fresh and glorious feat, but if the author did not use up some local tradition he was a clever fellow with a dash of Defoe in him.

Mr. Hepworth Dixon's 'Life,' published in 1852, is a work of undoubted research, and had at least the advantage of being written before his style had reached its full maturity.

A long and careful article on Blake will be found in 'The Dictionary of National Biography,' vol. v.

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# ROBERT BLAKE.

## CHAPTER I.

### TO THE CIVIL WAR.

When Nelson was about to sail on the one unsuccessful enterprise of his life—the attack on Santa Cruz de Tenerife—he wrote these words to Earl St. Vincent: 'I do not reckon myself equal to Blake: but, if I recollect right, he was more obliged to the wind coming off the land than to any exertions of his own'. 'The greatest sailor since our world began' was not wholly just in his implied criticism on the seventeenth-century admiral. Blake did not sail into the harbour of Santa Cruz blindly relying on the chapter of accidents to give him a means of retreat, but this sentence is none the less peculiarly fit to stand at the head of his biography. If Robert Blake had no other claim to be remembered, it would still be enough to entitle him to a high place among our heroes, that he planned and successfully carried out an enterprise which, a hundred and fifty years later, in the midst of a war of continual victories, still seemed over-bold to Horatio Nelson.

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Robert Blake, like the great soldier and statesman who became his sovereign, 'was by birth a gentleman; living neither in any considerable height, nor yet in obscurity'. The Blakes were indeed a family of less wealth and less distinguished connections than the Cromwells, but they belonged to the same class. They were country gentry in Somersetshire, owning land and engaged in trade. The anonymous author of the 'History and Life' of the admiral probably tells the strict truth when he says that the 'Blakes of Plansfield, in Spaxton parish, were of good antiquity, but of no higher account as to descent than that of the principal yeomanry'. The name was a form of Black, and is so spelt by the author of the 'Life of Cornelius van Tromp'. Early in Elizabeth's reign the Blakes were settled in Bridgewater, and were prosperous traders of sufficient standing to fill the most important municipal offices of the town, and sufficient wealth to leave legacies to the poor. A tradition, no better founded than such things usually are, tells how the first information of the sailing of the Invincible Armada was brought by a Bridgewater ship, the property of Humphrey Blake, the admiral's father. Whether he did the State this service or not, it is certain that he was a prosperous man who left behind him a considerable fortune and a very large family. The fortune is put at 8000*l*., a much larger sum in the early seventeenth century than it would be in these days. Even at the end of the last century, Boswell wrote of the Thrales' 135,000*l*. as he would have written of 1,000,000, or even 2,000,000, in this year of grace 1886. In 1625, the date of Humphrey Blake's death, 8000*l*. was a third of the income of the richest noble

in England, the Earl of Worcester, and common report is exceptionally mendacious if 100,000 would bear the same proportion to the equivalent revenue now. The money was invested in an estate at Knoll Hill, near Bridgewater, which continued in the admiral's possession till his death, and passed to his brother. The names of thirteen sons, of whom six grew to manhood, and of two daughters, have been preserved, and there is some reasons for believing that even this long list is not exhaustive. Robert Blake was the eldest of the family. His baptism is entered in the parish register under the date of September 27, 1599, and his parents must have been lax in the discharge of their religious duties if they deferred the ceremony for more than a week after his birth. He was, therefore, some five months younger than Oliver Cromwell. As he owes his fame to the discharge of duties forced on him by the Civil War, but not sought by any ambition of his own, the records of his early life are necessarily scanty. He was a middle-aged man before he gave up the quiet life of a country gentleman. So little is known about him that it is possible in his case to apply the system of modern historians in the most developed form, and incorporate all the authorities in the text verbatim. They are in fact only two—Anthony Wood and Clarendon. The first, giving a list of B.A.s in his 'Fasti,' under the date of February 10, 1617, says: 'Robert Blake of Wadham College. This right valiant person having taken no higher degree in this University, I must therefore make mention of him in this place. Born therefore he was at Bridgewater in Somersetshire, being the son and heir of Humphrey Blake of that place, gent., but

descended of an ancient family, of the Blakes of Blanchfield in the said county. In the beginning of Lent Term in 1615, he, being then about fifteen years of age, was matriculated in the University as a member of St. Albans Hall, about which time, standing for a scholarship of C. C. Coll. with Rob. Hegge and Rob. Newlin, was put aside, whether for want of merit or friends I cannot tell. While he continued in the said Hall he was observed by his contemporaries to be an early riser and studious, but withal he did take his pleasure fishing, fowling, and sometimes in stealing of swans. Before the time came when he was to take a degree in Arts he translated himself to his countrymen in Wadham Coll., and as a member of that house he did stand for a fellowship of Merton Coll. with Alex. Fisher, John Douglas, Edw. Reynolds, John Earl, &c., an. 1619, but whether it was for want of scholarship, or that his person was not handsome or proper (being but of stature little), which Sir Henry Savile, then Warden of that Coll., did much respect, he lost it, continued in Wadham Coll. without the taking of any other degree, and in 1623 wrote a copy of verses on the death of the learned Camden. Afterwards he went into his own country, where he lived in the condition of a gentleman, but always observed to be Puritanically inclined.'

So far Anthony Wood, saying very much what Clarendon says in his more stately way as far as the mere facts go. 'He was a man of a private extraction, yet had enough left him by his father to give him a good education, which his own inclination disposed him to receive in the University of Oxford, where he took

the degree of a Master of Arts [it was a B.A.], and was enough versed in books for a man who intended not to be of any profession, having sufficient of his own to maintain him in the plenty he affected, and having then no appearance of ambition to be a greater man than he was. He was of a melancholy and sullen nature, and spent his time most with good fellows, who liked his moroseness and the freedom he used in inveighing against the licence of the times and the power of the Court. They that knew him inwardly discovered that he had an anti-monarchical spirit, when few men thought the Government in any danger.' This account is doubtless substantially accurate, and may be accepted with the proviso that Clarendon wrote after the Civil War, and does not profess to have known Blake personally. He would naturally interpret the admiral's early opinions by the light of his later actions.

If the amount of evidence is not considerable, it has the merit of affording a reasonably good text for speculation. And the biographers have not been wanting to themselves. They have asked how Blake came to lose the fellowships, and what would have happened to England if he had won either. Even Dr. Johnson has left a sententious reflection on Sir Henry Savile's curious whim as a thing not to be expected from an editor of Chrysostom. In the course of conversation, if the subject had ever come up, the doctor would probably have pointed out that Wood's passing reference to the Warden's liking for tall fellows was not necessarily much more than a proof of the Oxford man's fondness for a mild jest at the expense of the head of a College. Neither was it necessary for Mr. Hepworth Dixon to

bring in Blake's Puritan principles to account for his failure. Biographers have, in fact, 'jumped' to the conclusion that because the student from Somersetshire beat Tromp in the fifties he was qualified to hold a fellowship thirty years earlier. For the rest, if he had gained one, it would not have prevented him from girding on the sword in 1642. Colonel Michael Jones made a very efficient commander of the Parliament's army in Ireland, lawyer as he was, and a fellowship, even if he had held it so long, would not have prevented Blake from defending Taunton. As regards his learning we may safely accept Clarendon's statement that the future admiral worked at Oxford as much and as little as thousands of others who have gone through the University because it was part of their education as gentlemen, but with no intention of qualifying for a learned profession. He could quote Latin to the end of his life. The verses on Camden's death were not by him, but by William Blake, perhaps a younger brother, and it is possible that Wood's mistake as to their authorship led him into exaggerating the length of Robert's stay at the University.

Upon the death of his father in 1625, Blake entered into possession of the family estate of Knoll Hill, and with it he would naturally undertake the duty of educating and establishing in life his very numerous brothers and sisters. This obligation, which was the burden attached to his privileges as eldest son, probably accounts for the fact that he lived unmarried; 'though some would insinuate,' says a biographer, 'that, as far as his religion would allow, he had a monkish turn, and others, that he was a woman-hater'. His election as

member for Bridgewater in 1640 is to a certain extent a proof of the truth of Clarendon's statement that Blake was known for the freedom of his comments on the King's administration. Two Puritan divines, Devenish and Norman, are said to have been mainly instrumental in securing his return. Indeed, the admiral's whole life is there to prove that he was one of the majority of thinking Englishmen, Clarendon himself and Falkland among them, who heartily disliked Charles's method of government. England was not oppressed by a grinding tyranny between 1625 and 1640, nor was it the country to have endured oppression. The habit of talking of the King as if he had been a Duke of Alva, popular a few years ago, may now be given up; but if Charles was not a tyrant he was guilty of the folly of continually advancing claims which would have led to tyranny if applied by a stronger man. His habit of appealing to a higher law which gave him the right to override the law as known to Englishmen was in itself enough to irritate his subjects. They feared for the future if they were not seriously oppressed in the present. And this government which asked the country to trust its wisdom so blindly was weak at home and imbecile in its foreign policy. Above all, Englishmen suspected, and, as we now know, with justice, that the Court, if not the King, was prepared to go to dangerous lengths in intriguing with the Pope and the Catholic Powers. They saw the King's fondness for all that seemed to tend to Rome, and his hearty dislike to whatever was most hostile to it. The long struggle with Spain and the Catholic reaction had made it the first article of most Englishmen's creed, that the Pope and all he represented were the

visible agents of the enemy. It is permissible to have no doubt of Blake's opinion on the subject. He almost certainly looked at the Romanising tendencies of the Court and the misgovernment of the King as parts of the same whole, which it was the duty of Englishmen to amend at the first fair opportunity. With these opinions he would naturally be a welcome candidate for the country party, when the failure of the first Bishops' war[1] compelled Charles to have recourse to his Parliament after an interval of eleven years.

Blake was not re-elected after the hasty dissolution of the Short Parliament. His place was taken in the Long Parliament by a Wyndham. The fact that the Wyndhams were steady Royalists throughout the war is not in itself a proof that there had been any change of opinion in Bridgewater between the beginning and the end of 1640. In the November of that year the country had been angered and frightened into unanimity. It was determined to be done with the kind of government it had endured for more than a generation under James and Charles. Men who were to fight for the King, and men who were to fight for King and Parliament, were of one mind when the Houses met at Westminster. While this vehement feeling lasted, it mattered little who was chosen by a constituency as its representative, as long as he was not a mere courtier, and Bridgewater would naturally send a member of a great neighbouring house to Parliament. The influence of the Wyndhams was strong in that part of Somerset,

[1] It is, I trust, not impertinent to remind the reader that the 'first Bishops' war,' so called, was the King's futile attempt to support Episcopacy in Scotland in 1639.

and would be vigorously used at such a crisis as a matter of course.

Fifteen months later a great change had come over the country. The attack on the King's methods of government had inevitably developed into an attack on the hereditary power of the crown. With this change had come division; on one side, a profound distrust of the character of the King, and an equally deep hatred of the ecclesiastical policy of Laud, had taken form in a series of measures, which, whatever else we may think of them, were assuredly calculated to produce a very sweeping change in the character of the English Monarchy and Church. Men who thought first of all of the liberties of England and the Puritan side of religion were prepared to support these measures. On the other hand, those to whom the ancient Monarchy and the Church of their youth were dear recoiled when they began to see whither the Parliament was tending. In the early summer of 1642 England was at the parting of the ways, and though she knew it not, was on the verge of the great Civil War.

Sainte-Beuve, in his essay on D'Aubigné, has noted the old Huguenot's delight in the hearty zeal of the Frenchmen's fighting in the religious struggle of the sixteenth century. It was little, in D'Aubigné's opinion, that torrents of blood were spilt, but much that Frenchmen could freely throw away their lives for a cause. We may be pardoned, or even think no pardon is needed, for looking in some such spirit on our own great struggle of the seventeenth century. There was hypocrisy and spite and acrid priggery on the side of the Parliament. There was unpatriotic intrigue and dissolute ruffianism

on the side of the King, but it is not by these things that either side is to be judged. The meaner men of the parties could never have emerged from obscurity except by the involuntary help of nobler fighters. It may be said of the country as justly as of its King, that it nothing common did nor mean upon that memorable scene. Cavalier and Roundhead both fought like men, and it is good for a country when its sons can so fight for principles.

Blake took the side of the Parliament, and having once drawn the sword, he threw away the scabbard. In the absence of any details of his words and actions we are reduced to argue from the conduct of the class to which he belonged, in order to form an idea of his course. As a small country gentleman of Puritanical leanings and grim anti-papal patriotism his natural place was with the Parliament. He took it, and in the spirit at least he kept it till he died on board the 'George,' entering Plymouth Sound, worn out by the greatest series of victories save one ever gained by any English admiral.

## CHAPTER II.

### THREE SIEGES.

The crisis of the Civil War was passed before the name of Blake began to be of any considerable mark among the Parliamentary officers. His great feat, the defence of Taunton, was performed during a year beginning six days after the battle of Marston Moor and ending in the July of the following year; when the New Model advanced into the West, after ruining the King's army in the Midlands at Naseby. During these critical months he alone upheld the cause of the Parliament in the important belt of country which extends from the Severn to the Channel, and he did his cause vital service by hindering the Western army from marching to the help of the King. Up to July, 1644, he had been known only as an able and trustworthy officer in Popham's regiment of militia. As might be expected, his early services have shone with a certain amount of glory reflected from his later victories. Family tradition, and even contemporary Royalist opinion, have credited him with having raised a troop, variously said to have been horse, foot, or dragoons, for the forces of the Parliament. This statement seems to have been dictated rather by the opinion of the writers as to what, considering his

subsequent eminence, he ought to have done, than founded on any knowledge of what he actually did. Wherever his name appears, it is as a member of Popham's regiment. Whatever recruiting he did was doubtless for his own corps, and in that service he would naturally not be remiss. Indeed, when the war began, there was no occasion to raise particular corps for the Parliament's service in Somersetshire. The organised force of the county, formed of the militia regiments of Sir John Horner and Colonel Alexander Popham, was loyal to the Houses. They had so marked a superiority over the unorganised Royalists, that when the Marquis of Hertford attempted to serve the King's summonses of array at Wells in the summer of 1642, he was driven into Hampshire without even being able to strike a blow. It is characteristic of the absence of any conscious tendency to a social revolution on the Parliamentary side, that Popham's regiment was raised by precisely the means used to form forces for the King. Alexander Popham himself was a country gentleman of large estate, and he recruited his men from among the tenants on his manor of Houndstreet, near Bridgewater. Blake took his place, according to the social ideas of the time, as lieutenant or captain under his wealthy neighbour. At a later period we shall find the name of one of the Pophams associated with Blake's among the chiefs of the fleet.

A detailed account of the first campaigns in the West would be out of place here, but some leading facts must be mentioned for the purpose of showing, as far as possible, what was Blake's share in these, the most picturesque and chivalrous episodes of the Civil War. After

his failure at Wells in August of 1642, the Marquis of Hertford retired to Sherborne in Dorset. Here he remained till Goring surrendered Portsmouth to the Parliament, and then finding his position untenable, marched across Dorset and Somersetshire, to Minhead on the Bristol Channel. That he should have been allowed to march right past the force which had lately driven him from Wells is a proof of the military inexperience of both sides in the early times of the war, and also of the prevailing belief that the quarrel would be settled by the first battle between the King and the main Parliamentary army. The Somersetshire men were probably under the impression that it was nowise incumbent on them to fight unless they were directly attacked. If so, they soon had good cause to wish they had been more stirring. The marquis himself took ship at Minhead, and passed over to South Wales, but he despatched a small body of horse to Cornwall, under the command of Sir Ralph Hopton, the best officer in the King's service. This handful of cavalry, and its brave and skilful leader, were soon reinforced by the Cornish Royalists under Sir Bevil Greenvil, Sir Nicholas Slanning, and Sir John Trevannion, and from the two was formed the famous Cornish army which by the end of the summer of 1643 had conquered all the West, except the ports, for the King, and had joined hands with his forces from the midland counties. What share Blake had in the various scandalous Parliamentary defeats under their incompetent generals, the Earl of Stamford, and Ruthven, at Bodmin, Tavistock, Stratton, and elsewhere it is impossible to say. As part of the garrison of Bristol, to which his regiment belonged, was

detached under the earl in the West, it may, however, be the case that he learned his business in the wholesome school of defeat.

While the Cornishmen were organising and preparing for their advance, the Somersetshire Royalists had not been wholly idle. The Stawells, Wyndhams, and other Royalist gentry, whose estates for the most part lay to the west of the Parret, began to stir for their cause. As early as the summer of 1642 blood had been drawn by Sir John Stawell's arraymen at Marshall's Elms, and although the King's partisans were not yet strong enough to make head against the Parliamentarians, they kept up a struggle for influence for a time. It is in some part of this confused conflict that we must place an event in Blake's life which is singularly characteristic of the Puritan and the Englishman. His regiment was in possession of Bridgewater, engaged in trying to bring the surrounding country over from its allegiance to the Wyndhams. Among the captains of the regiment was Samuel Blake, his younger brother. One day 'Captain Samuel Blake was diverting himself at a little inn, then and now the Shoulder of Mutton, at Pawlet, four miles from Bridgewater' ('Hist. and Life,' p. 67), when he heard that a Royalist officer was at Combwich, in the neighbourhood, engaged in levying men for the King. The array captain was attended by an armed party, and Samuel Blake was alone, which of itself was sufficient reason for keeping quiet. The Malignant, moreover, was on his way to the Royalist side of the Parret, which was a further motive why Captain Samuel Blake should 'take his bate and go home' peacefully. With a rashness, however, which

may be, without excessive want of charity, partly accounted for by the excellence of the 'bate' at the Shoulder of Mutton, the Parliamentary officer started in pursuit of the intruders, and caught them up at Streachill. Here he persisted in attacking them, and was inevitably—but one hopes not without reluctance on the part of arraymen—cut down. The bad news was soon brought to Bridgewater, and reported to the officers of Popham's regiment. None of them were inclined to carry it to Blake, who was known to have a particular affection for his rash brother. While they were discussing in whispers and debating who should tell, in the constrained way natural to the circumstances, Blake joined them, and soon saw that something was amiss. The absence of his brother would of itself be a painful warning. He was not the man to hang back for hearing the worst, and his direct question soon extorted the evil news, with all the circumstances. When the story was ended, he made the laconic and superficially heartless comment, 'Sam had no business there,' and went stoically about his duty. When the work was done he returned to his quarters, and then the natural man let his grief have its way. When his door was shut his servant heard him break into weeping, exclaiming, 'Died Abner as the fool dieth'. He would be a strange Englishman who did not sympathise with Iago's reluctance to carry his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at.

By the summer of 1643 the Royalists were masters in the West. The Cornish army and Rupert's men had joined hands in Somersetshire, and had utterly routed the unlucky Sir William Waller at Roundaway Down.

In July the combined Royalist armies sat down before Bristol. The town was insecurely held by Colonel Nathaniel Fiennes for the Parliament with a weakish garrison. There was a strong Royalist party in Bristol, and a plot to hand it over to the King had only recently been crushed by stern military executions. Neither was the town strong in itself. It lies in the low ground round the juncture of the Avon and the Frome. On the south or Somersetshire side it was not commanded, but on the north or Gloucestershire side its defences were composed of forts on Prior's, St. Michael's, and Beacon Hills, which skirt the Frome. Blake was in command of Prior's Hill. These forts were connected by a low wall hastily constructed, and not appreciably strengthened by a shallow and for the most part dry ditch. As long as this line was held Bristol was safe, but when it was pierced at any point the town ceased to be defensible, for it lay 'in a hole,' as a Royalist officer who served in the siege justly points out. Once inside the line, the assailants could, of course, clear it by charging the defenders in flank. This is precisely what happened. The intaking of Bristol—to use Dalgetty's expressive though, unhappily, obsolete word—was an excellent example of the sieges of the Civil War. In these remarkable military operations—until Cromwell appeared on the scene—the general method seems to have been to send 'fire-balls' and other missiles over the wall at the roofs of the houses, until you thought you had thoroughly frightened the enemy, and then to fall on with pike and sword, keeping your cavalry ready for a charge up the streets as soon as the gates had been opened by the infantry. Against

a weak garrison or a sympathetic town, this procedure had its merits and succeeded very well. Where these conditions were wanting, as at Gloucester or Taunton, it commonly resulted in the loss of hundreds of men uselessly shot down at the edge of a ditch. The Royalists made their attacks from both sides: the Cornish army on the south, and Rupert's force, from Durdham Down, on the north. They prepared for the storm by a series of inefficient cannonades, night attacks, and other 'military masquerades,' which made 'beautiful pieces of danger' in the dark. In the course of these preparatory operations, Prior's Hill fort was 'shrewdly torn,' but it does not appear to have been effectually breached. At last, on the night of July 25-26, after various feints and postponements, the Royalist chiefs made their final and successful storm. The time had been fixed for the early morning of the 26th, but the Cornish men were so eager to begin that they anticipated the hour, and rushed furiously at the southern fortifications in the dark. They were decisively repulsed, with the loss of their gallant leaders, Slanning and Trevannion. As soon as Rupert's men on Durdham Down saw the flash of the Cornish army's fire, they, too, mustered for the attack, burning not to be outdone. One consequence of all this undisciplined ardour was that the northern force had to attack without their storming ladders, which were not yet ready, and, except at one point, they fared as might have been expected. Lord Grandison commanded the force which attempted Prior's Hill fort, and advanced with all the attention to art possible in his unprovided state. Captain Blake was found on the alert, with his matches

burning. Attacks to right and left of the fort, headed by lieutenants of Lord Rivers' regiment, with fifty men apiece but no ladders, were summarily beaten off. Colonel Fawcett attached a petard to a gate, but it exploded outwards only. Then the repulsed men were drawn together, reinforced from the reserve, and having failed at the weaker points, were sent ladderless, as before, to try the desperate task of storming the fort. They failed to shake the nerves of Captain Robert Blake and his musketeers, and were again beaten off with loss. Hopeless as the game was, the Royalists were not prepared to give it up. Their officers had many weaknesses, but want of courage was never one of them, and Sir Ralph Dutton brought his men on again, to be again uselessly sacrificed. A last attempt was now made by Lord Grandison himself. Sword in hand, he led his soldiers into the very ditch. By this time Blake had become so conscious of his strength that he no longer waited to be attacked, but sallied out and met the enemy at the foot of the wall. A purely professional soldier would have profited by his assailant's folly to win an easier victory, and have shot him down at leisure from over the parapet, but in the Civil War there was a certain love of fighting for its own sake, and a spirit of fair play, which made men do these rash things. The Parliamentarians yielded to the carnal vanity of a desire to show the Malignants that the saints were not afraid to meet them on equal terms, and so received them at push of pike in the ditch. Here, just as day was breaking, the last fight was fought. It was short, and for the Royalists terribly costly. Lord Grandison soon fell, mortally wounded. Colonel Owen, who took his place, was

disabled a few minutes later by a gunshot wound, and then, at last, the Royalists broke and fled down the hill. Meanwhile, the attacks on Brandon and St. Michael's Hills had ended no better for the assailants, but a line of defences is no stronger than its weakest part, and the Royalists had found the fatal spot. In the dip between Brandon Hill and Prior's Hill the ditch was shallow and dry, the wall low, and mostly made of turf. A body of Royalist infantry, led by Colonel Washington, scrambled over, apparently without meeting serious opposition, for the Parliamentarians had not force enough to hold all the wall. A breach was soon made in the turf barrier by Colonel Washington's pikes, and then Rupert's horse swept through and cleared the line by a vigorous charge. As soon as the Prince had forced his way to the suburbs of Bristol, Fiennes surrendered. He has been severely judged for the act, and in the following year he was condemned to death by a court-martial for his alleged cowardice. The sentence was undoubtedly harsh, since Bristol was really indefensible when once the forts on the heights were turned, and as the citizens were not prepared to make a Saguntum of their town, there was nothing left to do but to surrender. It is sufficient excuse for him to point out that Rupert himself had to surrender to the New Model under very similar circumstances. Fiennes, unfortunately for himself, drew suspicion on his courage by showing a flurry which was doubtless largely due to a consciousness that he had damaged his political career by military failure. One among his other laches served to attract some attention to the name of Blake. Fiennes, in his confusion, forgot to send news of his surrender to the officers command-

ing the forts. When they were summoned by the Royalists, two of them at least—Blake at Prior's Hill, and Captain Husbands at Brandon Hill—very properly refused to give up their posts till the surrender had been notified to them by their own commander. For this, it is said that Rupert, with his customary violence, threatened to hang them, and Clarendon adorns the tale by saying that Blake (he does not mention Husbands) was forgiven on the plea of ignorance urged by interceding friends. As a matter of fact, no such intercession was needed, the two officers, as Prince Rupert would know as soon as he heard the truth, having only done their strict duty.

From Bristol, Blake marched away with his regiment, probably more or less plundered by the Royalists who violated the capitulation. In the interval from July, 1643, to April, 1644, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and at the latter date he appears again as one of the officers commanding under Colonel Ceely, the governor of Lyme. As Rushworth speaks of him in July, 1644, as 'a stout commander belonging to the garrison of Lyme,' it is probable that he had been quartered there immediately after the loss of the port on the Avon. The capture of Bristol was the turning-point of the Royal fortunes in the West. Up to then their forces had won a series of well-deserved victories, but from the moment their cause appeared triumphant, a decline began which reduced the Western army from its place of honour among the King's forces to a mere rabble. The loss of Sir Bevil Greenvil, Sir Nicholas Slanning, and Sir John Trevannion, the first at Lansdown, the other two at Bristol, had removed the high-spirited gentlemen

who fought for King and Church. Hopton was called on service elsewhere. The folly of the King in displacing the Marquis of Hertford—the head of a family which had once claimed the crown, and therefore perhaps suspect in such troubled times—had deprived him of the services of one who, if he was not a general or statesman, was at least a patriotic English noble. In the room of these leaders the King's cause in the West came to be represented by Prince Maurice, a pale copy of his brother Rupert, and by such unworthy adventurers as Sir John Berkeley and that triple traitor, the drunken Goring. With such generals the Western army soon became demoralised, and then drifted to ruin. Soon after the capture of Bristol, Maurice, accompanied by Lord Carnarvon, marched to reduce Dorsetshire to obedience. He was even then defied by Poole and Lyme, in which Blake was perhaps already stationed, and turned from them, without making an attack, to hasten to Exeter, where the Earl of Stamford was still holding out for the Parliament. Exeter surrendered in September, 1643. Then Maurice, after quarrelling with Carnarvon, who rode away to die for the King elsewhere, made an unsuccessful attack on Plymouth, and in the spring of 1644 reappeared in Dorsetshire, and sat down before Lyme. It was of infinite importance to the King, who was stifling in the midland counties, to get access to the sea. As a natural consequence, the Parliament was concerned to baffle him. Lyme, a place of no military value in itself, was desired by the Royalists because it was a Channel port very conveniently situated for running cargoes of arms from France or Holland. The Parliament being well aware of that fact, had hastened to strengthen these ports

after the fall of Bristol, and the Earl of Warwick, their admiral, who was cruising in the Channel, had charge among his other duties to assist the garrison. In the town there were about a thousand men, while the besieging army of Prince Maurice is variously put at about twice and a half or three times that number. On April 21 [o.s.] he sat down before the town, and there he remained until June 15 [o.s.]. Up to May 23, when the Earl of Warwick's squadron arrived and relieved the town, the Prince and the garrison had a variety of brisk encounters, marked by the usual diversity of cannonades, assaults, repulses, and sallies. According to Colonel Weir, who wrote a 'diurnal' of the siege up to the arrival of the Earl of Warwick, Prince Maurice's guns, though they played very hot, did astonishingly little damage except to the thatched roofs of the houses. It is therefore not surprising that his assaults were uniformly unsuccessful, since a thousand resolute men, fighting behind a barrier or in loopholed houses, are a fair match for rather less than three times their own number of assailants. Colonel Ceely, however, did not confine himself to his lines. Before the end of April he had been already joined by two Parliamentary war-ships, commanded by Captains Seamaster (otherwise Somaster or Somersted in the careless spelling of those days) and Jones. These officers not only supplied him with stores but landed a naval brigade, and on April 30 [o.s.] the garrison, helped by our 'bold seamen,' sallied out, and according to Colonel Weir, killed so many of the enemy 'that the water that supplied the town was coloured with blood'. For the next three weeks he continues to report 'thundering alaruins,' with encounters

not a few. When the admiral anchored off the town on May 23, he found the houses of Lyme much battered, but its defences in good order. The garrison had suffered little loss of life, but was sadly in want of shoes, stockings, clothes, and pay. Their need of food was so serious that the sailors of the fleet offered to sacrifice a fourth of their rations of bread for the next four months, 'and to bate it proportionally out of every day's allowances, yet with hopes that the State would make it good again'. The generosity and its prudent qualification are alike characteristic of the British seaman. He was ready to help, but saw no reason why the official gentlemen should not lend a hand too. The contribution of the sailors, together with what else the earl could spare, made a substantial relief, and when he stood to sea after helping to beat off another assault in which Weir and Blake were both wounded, he could trust the town to take care of itself. It did so with complete success till the approach of Essex compelled Prince Maurice to raise the siege and march away to Cornwall, much discredited, according to Clarendon, by his failure before such an insignificant place.

Although Blake's name is only incidentally mentioned by contemporary authorities on the siege, it would seem, from the character of the next service on which he was employed, that he had risen steadily in the estimation of his superior officers. In July, 1644, he was detached with Sir John Pye to make an attempt on Taunton. This town had remained in the hands of the Royalists since the Cornish army's victorious invasion of Somersetshire, and was still held for them by Colonel Reeves. When Prince Maurice fell back before

Essex, he had withdrawn a large part of the garrison, but had not removed the stores in the castle. The hope of securing this magazine would have been enough to tempt a flying column of Roundheads, but they had other reasons for attempting the town. Taunton was not only the centre of a strongly Puritanical district, but was of inestimable value as a military post. It commanded a fertile territory, and as it lay on the line of communication between the West and the midland counties, a Puritan garrison within its walls would be a particularly irritating thorn in the side of the Royalists. When Sir John Pye and Blake marched out of Lyme, the military situation was very favourable to their enterprise, as Essex had swept the Royalists out of the field in Somersetshire for the moment. On July 8 the Parliamentary flying column appeared before Taunton, and summoned Colonel Reeves. The King's officer made no resistance. With a mere handful of men as a garrison, and an unfriendly town to hold, he was in fact in no position to fight, and he did the best he could for his cause by obtaining terms which allowed him to carry his soldiers to the nearest Royal post. He was compelled to leave his stores, and so the captors found 'in the castle one demi-culverin and ten other small pieces, two tons of match, eight barrels of powder, store of arms and ammunition, with much household furniture and plenty of provisions'. These last were probably the treasures of Malignants, and had been put in the castle for safe keeping. There was soon to be need for the munitions of war.

Blake had now reached that crisis in a soldier's life which has been fatal to so many promising officers.

After doing good work as a subordinate, he was now left in command, and in no easy one either. Sir John Pye was called away, and Blake was appointed governor of Taunton, with the rank of colonel. Before the end of 1644 he had to fight for his post. The King indeed made no attempt on the town, either in his march into Cornwall in pursuit of Essex, or during his return eastward after receiving the surrender of the Parliamentary foot at Foy in September. He had good reason for his neglect as long as the Parliamentary general's army was unbroken, but he paid dearly for leaving Blake unattacked on his return. The loss of Taunton was destined to be one of the causes of the ruin of the following year. It was Blake's obstinate defence of the town 'which indeed disappointed all our hopes,' says Clarendon, 'both in men and money in that great county, for it kept 4000 foot and 5000 horse employed nearly all the summer of 1645'.

The leaguer of Taunton was twice interrupted by Royalist defeats, so that in fact Blake had to defend his post through three sieges. His first assailant was the Colonel Wyndham who succeeded him as member for Bridgewater. He having failed to hold his ground in front of the town, was replaced by Sir Richard Greenvil, who was wounded, and followed by Sir John Berkeley, who was driven away in his turn. Goring renewed the siege and remained there till Fairfax and Cromwell came red-handed from Naseby Field in hot haste to make an end of the King's army in the West. The military details of the siege are of the kind usual in the Civil War. Taunton was then a country town of greater relative importance than it is to-day, but it was even then a

small place, consisting of some three parallel streets connected by alleys; with its church, grammar school, and castle; the whole being surrounded by an old-fashioned wall. Its real strength lay in its resolute garrison, and in the determination of its citizens to hold out to the last. Against this post the Royalists brought horse, foot, and dragoons, but no proper battering train, and apparently no sappers and miners. They fired over the wall, and burnt down whole streets of houses, but they made no breach, and the loss of life they succeeded in inflicting was trifling. Two hundred in killed and wounded is reported to have been the extent of the garrison's casualties throughout the lengthy siege. Blake was not helped only by the military inefficiency of the Royalists, but by the feuds which divided their commanders and led to the endless intrigues and quarrels described over whole pages of Clarendon. This disintegration of the besiegers was of material assistance to the Parliamentary commandant, and has much to do with accounting for his successful defence. Had the King's officers been united, and had their attacks been properly made, Taunton must soon have fallen. It is, however, no diminution of Blake's glory that he had not to defend his post against a united or efficient enemy. No general can do more than avail himself to the utmost of his opponents' mistakes or weakness. His defence of Taunton was no such feat as the defences of Londonderry or Saragossa, but if Taunton had been assailed as these towns were, no courage or skill could have prolonged the defence for a week.

The first summons to surrender came from Colonel

Wyndham, and was answered with a defiance in stern, pious, Puritan style. 'These,' wrote Blake, 'are to let you know that, as we neither fear your menaces nor accept your Proffer, so we wish you, for the time to come, to desist from all overtures of the like nature unto us, who are resolved, to the last Drop of our Blood, to maintain the Quarrel we have undertaken, and doubt not but the same God who hath hitherto protected us will, ere long, bless us with an issue answerable to the justness of our cause; however, to him alone shall we stand or fall.' Blake was soon able to show that the spirit of the garrison was 'answerable' to the firmness of the governor's language. While Goring, who should have been covering the siege, was engaged in one of the numerous drinking bouts, or equally numerous intrigues which divided his time between them, a Parliamentary officer of the name of Vandruske succeeded in slipping past the Royalist army and bringing a force of horse and dragoons into Taunton. With this reinforcement Blake sallied, attacked Wyndham with complete success, and drove him in rout back to Bridgewater. The defeat of Wyndham seems to have opened the eyes of the Royalists to the importance of Taunton. Goring and the council of the Prince of Wales suspended their disputes so far as to make some preparation for an effectual siege, and in early spring Sir Richard Greenvil sat down before the town. He was disabled by a wound at an early period, and succeeded by Sir John Berkeley, a Royalist of the Goring stamp. Sir John began by gaining some measure of success. He stormed an isolated post at Wellington House, a little distance out of Taunton, and ruined it

completely. Then he devoted himself for months to blockading the town, to firing into it, and to laying stratagems to draw Blake out, such as were used by the Good Lord James against the garrison of Castle Dangerous. The bombardment failed to shake the citizens, and the stratagems were useless against the caution of Blake, but the blockade soon began to reduce the town to straits. The sufferings of the townsmen do not seem to have reached a point which a German of the period of the Thirty Years' War would have considered as far removed from prosperity. The author of the 'Song of Triumph,' composed to be sung on May 11, in memory of the raising of the siege, has obviously collected all that his own experience or tradition had to tell him of the sufferings of the time, and yet it is doubtful whether a burgher of a Thuringian town or a peasant of the Palatinate would have recognised his picture as representing the horrors of war at all. Thus he sings in barely tolerable verse :—

Our bread was fourteen pence per pound,
  And all things sold full dear,
Which made our soldiers make short meals
  And pinch themselves full near.

Our beer was eighteen pence per quart
  (As for a truth was told),
And butter eighteen pence per pound
  To Christians there was sold.

Still beer at eighteen pence the quart represented grievous discomfort to the prosperous townsmen or yeomen of Taunton Dean, and as summer drew near, it became likely that worse was in store for them. A

local tradition tells how they were reduced to their last pig, and how Blake, with more ingenuity than humanity, caused the poor beast to be whipped at different parts of the walls, in order that its squeals might mislead the besiegers into thinking that the town had still whole herds to feed on. If the author of the splayfooted 'Encomiastik' published after Blake's death is to be believed, he gave the Royalists a kinder proof of the abundance of his resources. Sir John Berkeley sent in a trumpeter to summon the town. His message was answered as Wyndham's had been, and then the Parliamentary colonel gave the messenger, who was in a very ragged state, a new suit of clothes. The object of this patronising piece of kindness was undoubtedly to irritate the Royalists, but the trumpeter's gain was clear. Meanwhile, Blake missed no opportunity of informing the Parliament of the dangerous position of the town, and of asking for help. He seems to have found little difficulty in communicating with London, by means of messengers who slipped through the Royalist lines. The Parliament was fully aware of the importance of relieving Taunton, and answered his appeals by votes of thanks and promises of assistance. It was easier, however, to promise help than to send it. The quarrel between Manchester and Cromwell, between the Presbyterians and the root and branch men, had come to a head in the spring of 1645, and had caused a temporary paralysis of the Parliamentary armies. The self-denying ordinance had for a moment disorganised their forces, and Sir Thomas Fairfax was engaged in forming the New Model at Windsor. This invincible body was destined to bring swift ruin on the King, but Sir John

Berkeley's blockade was beginning to press heavily on Taunton before it was ready to take the field.

In the beginning of May, the time had at last come. Sir Thomas Fairfax reported his army ready for service, and was at once ordered to march to raise the siege of Taunton. He broke up from Windsor, and advanced with his whole force to Blandford. Here messengers from London stopped him with the news that the King had drawn his army out from Oxford, and was threatening the city itself. He was therefore ordered to return with the bulk of his troops, and to detach a portion only to Taunton. Fairfax consequently advanced out of Blandford on the road to Dorchester, and then turned eastward, after providing for the service in the West. 'Accordingly,' says Sprigge, 'a Brigade is appointed for Taunton, of four regiments of foot, *viz.*, Colonel Welden's, Colonel Fortescue's, Colonel Floyd's and Colonel Inglesby's; commanded by Colonel Welden as eldest colonel; unto whom six companies of foot belonging to the garrison of Chichester joined themselves about Dorchester, and as many colours from Lyme (Blake's old comrades) after that; in all about 4 or 5000 foot, besides a body of horse of 1800 or 2000, consisting of Colonel Graves his regiment, Colonel Cook's, Colonel Popham's, Colonel Fitz-James's, and the Plymouth regiment. All which, horse and foot, were well combined in mutual love to each other and common resolution against the enemy.' With this high-spirited and united body, Welden advanced by forced marches to within ten miles of Taunton, to a post on the hills, and there by a preconcerted signal informed Blake that he was at hand to help him in driving off Sir John Berkeley.

There was, however, no need for fighting. The news of Fairfax's advance to Blandford had been brought to Sir John, and he at once saw that the decisive moment had arrived. Believing that he would soon have the whole Parliamentary army upon him, he decided on making a last attempt to get the town. A few days before Welden reached the neighbourhood, the Royalist general divided his force; one part was ordered to remove to the eastward, and then return as if it were a Parliamentary army, and make a sham attack on the besiegers. The object of this stratagem was to draw Blake out to help his supposed friends, when the whole Royalist party might have fallen on him. As the Parliamentary commander was very well informed of Welden's movements, and did not hear the signal agreed on, he kept to his lines. Whereupon the enemy seeing their wisdom turn to foolishness, 'fell,' in the words of Sprigge, 'to firing the town with their granadoes and mortar-pieces, whereby two long streets of the town, of fair buildings, were burnt to the ground, and withal they stormed most furiously. But they met with a gallant commander-in-chief in Colonel Blake, and as valiant soldiers, that gave them such showers of lead as filled the trenches with their dead carcases.' The repulse was complete, but the Royalists seem on this occasion to have entered the town, and to have been beaten out after fierce fighting. In this last encounter, tradition, reported by the dubious Oldmixon, tells how one Bawdon, a Parliamentary officer, had his thumb shot off while engaged in driving out the Royalists, and 'protested that the rogues should not carry it away with them,' which one does not suppose they would be likely

to do. Bawdon was of another opinion, and remained, searching for his lost thumb. One of a Royalist party, which had barricaded itself in an alehouse, and according to the Puritan story, were tippling in the midst of all this fury, saw him and shot at him, so that he died a revolutionary victim to the rights of property. It is also recorded that while Blake was fighting on the walls the pious and painful Mr. Welman did his part in the defence by expounding Malachi iii. 2: 'And who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap'.

After this repulse Sir John Berkeley did not wait for the approach of the Parliamentary forces. In the belief, as he averred, that Sir Thomas Fairfax's whole army was marching on him, he broke up his camp in haste and disorder, and marched off, cutting down trees to barricade the roads behind him. With the storm of the 11th and Welden's entry on May 14th, the most trying part of the siege was over, but Taunton had not yet seen the last of the Royalists. As soon as Goring learnt the smallness of Welden's forces, he collected his troops and surrounded the town again. There he remained deaf to the King's appeals for help in the Midlands, alleging as his excuse for inaction that he could not leave Taunton in the hands of the enemy, and boasting that he would soon compel it to capitulate. The presence of Welden's troops in the town frightened the Royalists from trying an assault, though they were able to drive the garrison in when it attempted to sally, but it made the strain on the provisions very heavy. Towards the middle of June things were as bad as ever.

Blake and Welden were sending pressing messages for relief, and representing that their ammunition was running short. The Parliament promptly voted a new force for the relief, and Massey the Presbyterian, who was somewhat in disgrace since Manchester's downfall, was appointed to the command. He had no opportunity of distinguishing himself in this new post. The great victory at Naseby on June 14 had totally disabled the King from threatening London, and left Fairfax at liberty to march westward. On June 28 he was at Marlborough in Wiltshire. He reached Blandford in Dorset on July 2, and was there joined by Massey with the new levies. Here he learnt that Goring had already burnt his huts and drawn off to Blackdown on the borders of Devonshire. At Dorchester, which he reached next day, the news was confirmed, and prisoners taken by a party of his horse at Crewkerne gave him the further good news that the Royalists had retreated by Ilminster to Langport. Fairfax, with his troops in admirable order and spirit, advanced by Beaminster to Taunton, and the siege was at an end.

The remaining military services of Blake on shore were confined to the blockade of Dunster, a stronghold of the Luterels at the east end of Exmoor, and to the discharge of his duties as governor of Taunton. The castle was once relieved by a body of Royalist horse, who slipped through while a part of the blockading force had been drawn off to Corfe Castle. Blake was not able to oppose the relief, but he took his revenge on their return. With the help of the country people he fell upon the rear of the Royalists and cut them up severely. The castle surrendered early in 1646, when the capitu-

lation of Barnstaple enabled Fairfax to despatch two regiments of foot to Blake's assistance. In the course of the year he entered the Long Parliament for Taunton as a 'recruiter' in place of Sir William Portman, who had been expelled for malignancy. As a member of Parliament he was compelled to resign his military command by the self-denying ordinance; and, indeed, there were no longer any troops which he could command. The House recognised his services by a vote of 500*l*., and rewarded Taunton by a gift of 1000*l*. to help it to rebuild its ruined houses. After the surrender of Hopton, the local Parliamentary forces in the West were disbanded, and the New Model alone remained on foot. The first Civil War was over.

# CHAPTER III.

## THE NAVY OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

If Blake had died within two years after his defence of Taunton, he would only have been remembered with the Parliamentary officers of the second rank, with Skippon, Brereton, or Massey. His career in the House was obscure. He does not appear to have taken any part in the growing quarrel between the Presbyterians and the Independents. In the spring of 1648, however, the beginning of the second Civil War opened to him a new field, and he began the great career in which he won in some respects the most enviable reputation gained by any man of his generation. In May of that year the squadron in the Downs revolted and passed over to the Prince of Wales in Holland. This disaster forced upon the Parliament the necessity of putting the navy into thoroughly trustworthy hands, and on February 24, $16\frac{48}{49}$ [o. s.], a commission was issued 'to Colonel Popham, Colonel Blake, and Colonel Deane, or any two of them, to be Admirals and Generals of the fleet now at sea'. The Committee of the Navy decided that they were to rank in the order in which their names were written in the commission, so that Blake began his naval services as second in command of the national fleet.

The navy to which Blake's services were so suddenly, and, according to modern practice, so strangely transferred, was, strictly speaking, the force we know by the name to-day. It was a permanent armament kept on foot in time of peace, and governed by officials in continual employment, not like the armies of the time, a body raised for a special war, and disbanded when the fighting was over. In spite of this continuity, however, the superficial differences are so great that the navies seem separate bodies rather than the same at two stages of its development. The great change which has come over the material part divides them even less than the dissimilarity in their organisation. To-day the navy is commanded by specially educated officers, and manned by seamen who are a strictly professional body. From the Admiral of the Fleet down to the youngest boy just sent from the 'St. Vincent,' everybody has a well-defined place to fill, a rigidly fixed set of duties to perform, a career laid out for him, and a certainty that if he 'sticks to the service' the State will provide for him, not very generously perhaps, but at least surely, as long as he lives. His dress is cut and marked according to rule, and shows his exact rank. The ship he serves in must be painted in a certain way. Such and such kinds of furniture are allowed, while others are not. The naval seaman of to-day lives in a world severely regulated by law, and his course is marked out for him by a code of some magnitude. He is no mere machine, but he is a part of a great and complicated organisation.

In the seventeenth century all this either did not exist or existed only in germ. There was a fixed centre

of administration at Whitehall, and in the dockyards, but outside of that everything was unsettled or regulated only by the custom of the sea. The mere fact that no uniform was selected for the navy till the middle of the eighteenth century is enough to show how vague was its organisation. There was, indeed, no regular body of naval officers till the close of the seventeenth century. Some men did spend their lives in the navy, but even they were trusted personal servants of the King rather than members of a corps of officers. Until the end of the seventeenth century, it was not even thought necessary that an admiral or captain should be a seaman. In very early days the King's fleets were composed for the most part of merchantmen impressed for the war. The master and crew were taken with their vessel, and it was their duty to navigate her. The captain and his lieutenant were officers in command of soldiers put on board, not to sail the ship, but to fight her. This rough and ready system had begun to fall into disfavour with good judges as early as Elizabeth's time. Many, though by no means all of her captains, were seamen, but the old practice lived on with the usual pertinacity of an English custom. In face of the glorious record of her times, and the triumphs of the navy of the Commonwealth, it is impossible to say that the system was wholly bad. No doubt a sensible landsman left his master to handle the ship, and confined himself to ordering where he was to take her. When Monk, in the excitement of battle, forgot he was no longer a colonel of cavalry, and roared out to his crew the order to wheel to the left, the sailors laughed, but the master interpreted his meaning to the man at the helm, and the ship was duly laid

alongside the Dutchman. Still, a system which left the captain so much at the mercy of a subordinate was bad, and became inevitably worse in proportion as naval warfare became more a matter of manœuvring. Sir William Monson, the author of the 'Naval Tracts,' and one of the last survivors of the great Elizabethan generation, had pointed out the superiority of the seaman captains long before Blake's time. During the Commonwealth it seems to have been the rule to give the command of ships to sailors. In the reign of Charles the ordinary establishment of a 'capital' ship, a ship of the line, was a captain, a lieutenant (though there was no officer of this rank in the smaller class of vessels), a master, a pilot, and a varying number of master's mates. The pay of a captain ranged, according to the size of his vessel, from 4*l*. 6*s*. 8*d*. a month to 14*l*., to which was added some very uncertain perquisites for carrying treasure, giving convoy, and so forth. A lieutenant received from 2*l*. 16*s*. to 3*l*. 10*s*.; a master from 2*l*. 6*s*. 8*d*. to 4*l*. 13*s*. 9*d*.; a pilot from 1*l*. 3*s*. 4*d*. to 2*l*. 5*s*., and the master's mates from 1*l*. 3*s*. 4*d*. to 2*l*. 5*s*. a month. This pay lasted only as long as the ship was in commission. When once she was paid off, officers and crew might shift for themselves.

The navy was manned, as it continued to be down to this century, by voluntary engagement, largely tempered by the pressgang. Men were taken for the commission, and paid at the end, the wages of a common man being 15*s*. a month, with his rations. The Parliament raised their pay to 1*l*. At the end of the century the weekly allowance of a sailor was 'seven pounds of biscuit, seven gallons of beer, four pounds

of beef, two pounds of pork, one quart of peas, three pints of oatmeal, six ounces of butter, and twelve ounces of cheese, and besides, all the fresh fish which is caught, without any deduction for it'. Rum as yet was not, but always providing the stores were good, these rations were amply sufficient to keep a man in health and strength. In the main, the administration of the navy under Charles and the Commonwealth was honest. There were peculation and mismanagement, but neither reached the scandalous height they attained after the Restoration. In one respect the seaman of the early seventeenth century was better off than the men who manned the fleets of Hawke and Rodney. The commissions were short. There were no foreign stations. At home the fleet was equipped for the 'winter and summer guards,' such lasting only a few months. As yet the practice of paying off at the end of a commission did not mean that the crew were kept waiting for years, imprisoned on board at the mercy of money-lending pursers who made advances at usurious interest. Neither does the cat seem to have been used with the freedom of later days. Punishments were rough. The custom of the seas allowed of great ferocity in the case of such offences as stabbing and robbery, but there were no floggings of two and three hundred lashes for small delinquencies. In fact, in days when the Spanish Main was open to a crew of adventurous spirits, a captain might hesitate before indulging in the kind of brutality which drove the crew of the 'Hermione' into mutiny.

The system of the seventeenth century was a fairly good one for the time. It had to be carried

on into wholly different circumstances before it produced the abuses which, in their turn, produced the mutiny at Spithead. The Commonwealth was indeed exceptionally favourable to the seamen. Its generally vigorous policy induced it to promote the general interests of the country, and its kindness was stimulated by purely selfish motives. After the mutiny in the Downs, the Parliament had need to attach the sailors to itself by good pay and good treatment.

To form an idea of the ships of that time from anything which now floats is almost impossible. A comparison with a steamer would of course be absurd, but even the great sailing clippers of to-day are so widely different as to be utterly unlike. They are longer, narrower, simpler in form, and far more elaborately rigged. If we wish to realise the sort of vessel which carried Blake's flag, perhaps the best way would be to pay a visit to the 'Victory' at Portsmouth, and then to the model rooms at Greenwich. The deck of Nelson's flagship looks small when seen from the poop, and the 'George' would have looked far smaller. She was even broader in proportion to her length, and built higher out of the water. Few of the ships of the navy in 1648 were of over a thousand tons. These comparatively small vessels were more imposing than they would seem likely to have been from their mere size. Look at the model of the 'Royal Sovereign' (Mr. Peter Pett's great ship) at Greenwich, or at the 'Bristol' of 50 guns, which lived to be taken by Duguay-Trouin, or at the nameless 50-gun ship built in 1650. The stern towers up, broad at the water line and narrow above. Here there is a thin strip of deck from side to side. From

below this runs out another deck, with a slight downward slope, which ends before the mizen mast. This is the poop. From under this again comes out another, which ends just before the main, and is known as the quarter-deck. Standing on the edge of this, one would look down on what, with some apparent absurdity, is called the upper deck, because it was the highest of all which ran the whole length of the vessel. Under this was the main deck, which in the case of the great ships carried guns. From either side of the quarter-deck two narrow gangways ran forward, and ended in the forecastle. This was then exactly what its name implies—a solid square fort rising from the level of the upper deck, rather higher than the poop, carrying guns, and capable of being defended even if the rest of the ship was in possession of an enemy. These vessels were armed with from thirty-six to seventy guns, ranging from six to forty-eight pounders. The English ordnance of that time was famous for its excellence, which may have had something to do with inducing the Admiralty to overgun their ships, to the ruin of their sailing powers. It is also to be noted that the English men-of-war of the seventeenth century were the best built vessels of their time. They were stronger than the Dutch, in which timber was spared from motives of economy, and they drew more water. The mediæval love of adorning weapons and ships still survived. Our war vessels, and those of other nations, were elaborately ornamented. Mr. Pett covered the stern, sides, and bows of his 'Royal Sovereign' with graven images of Neptune, Father Thames, the Genius of England, Valour, Fortitude, and His Sacred Majesty. She was a show ship, but even

smaller vessels were covered with wood carving, and had gilded laurel wreaths round the upper ports. The rigging had just reached a stage short of its complete development. Three-masted vessels carried courses, topsails, and topgallant sails. The place of the spanker on the mizen was occupied by a lateen sail, and the bowsprit, which rose from under the front side of the forecastle at a sharp angle, had a small mast stepped at the end, carrying a square sail known as the sprit.

'The seamen are in a manner a nation by themselves, a humorous, brave, and sturdy people; fierce and resolute in whatsoever they are inclined to, somewhat unsteady and inconstant in pursuing it, and jealous of those to-morrow by whom they are governed to-day.' Clarendon's well-known description has been true of the sailor from Chaucer's time to Marryat's. In the early seventeenth century, the crews which manned our ships had need to be brave and sturdy, fierce and resolute, for they were a nation which was always at war. The reigns of James and Charles are commonly dismissed as a barren period in the history of the navy, and not unjustly. The expeditions of these sovereigns were all unfortunate, and the attack on Cadiz in 1626 was disgraced by mutiny, and even by cowardice. Still both did much to increase the strength of the navy. They even did something for the training of the men by fitting out fleets, though little use was made of them when at sea. The dockyards and the Admiralty must at least have been well practised in their duties. Officers and men must have learnt something during these cruises.

It was not, however, in the Royal navy that the sea-

men who conquered the fleets of Holland were trained, but on board the merchant ships which made the oversea voyages. In our times a South Sea chief cannot pillage a boat's crew without bringing upon himself the visit of a cruiser, but in the seventeenth century traders had to depend on themselves for protection. They went 'upon the sea on their lawful occasions,' with the distinct understanding that they had little or no assistance to expect from their Government. There was no peace on the sea.

Very early in James's reign the Earl of Salisbury asked a deputation of merchants who came to complain of the outrageous violence of a Spanish Viceroy of Sicily, whether they really expected the King to go to war whenever one of their ships was pillaged in the Levant. The merchants acknowledged that it would be an absurd pretension. All they asked was that the King would do his best for them by expostulation and bargain. For the rest they agreed that Englishmen who went far abroad for gain did so at their risk and peril. The adventurer had not far to go to meet enemies. Even the narrow seas, over which the King of England claimed sovereignty, swarmed with pirates. The privateers of Dunkerque who sailed under the flag of Spain against the trade of Holland were ready enough to overstep their commissions. Gentlemen of all nations who were in trouble took to the sea, as they took in after days to the road. 'Qui disait marin disait forban,' as Admiral Paris puts it, and not only privateers, but even merchantmen were not scrupulous about turning pirate. Piracy was a business. The Earl of Warwick, afterwards the Parliament's admiral

in the Civil War, did a large speculation in vessels which were called privateers, but which plundered all traders impartially under the flag of any obscure potentate who happened to be at war. When the narrow seas were left, the skipper knew he was sailing into the cruising grounds of other foes. In America, the coasts of New England and Virginia might be safe, but the long fight with France had begun to the north, and to the south were the possessions of Spain. The foreigner who sailed to the west of Pope Alexander's line, to take his share of the lucrative contraband trade, went with a sample of woollen goods in one hand and a boarding pike in the other. From armed smuggler to buccaneer was a short step, as may be seen from Dampier's history of the 'Cygnet' of London. The Sallee rovers lay in wait outside the Straits of Gibraltar. Within the Mediterranean was the great pirate stronghold of Algiers. Adventurers of all nations sailed from it to plunder indiscriminately. Two Englishmen at least, a deserter named Ward, and a gentleman of the ancient house of Verney, were famous among these sea-robbers. Verney came home, and was thought rather to have shown himself a credit to his family. The Murad Reis who sacked Baltimore in Ireland—for the Algerines cruised openly on the ocean—was a Fleming. Beyond Algiers were Tunis and Tripoli. The ships of the East India Company had to expect the armed opposition of Portuguese or Dutchmen on the coast of Coromandel or Malabar and among the Spice Islands. Factors and skippers of the three nations fought and made alliances, in complete indifference as to whether their countries were at war, or not, in Europe. Then, too, there were

native princes or Turkish pashas who would plunder if they could.

With so many foes waiting to pounce on him, the sailor had need to go armed, and to be prepared to stand on his defence. Accordingly the ships employed in the Indian, American, and Levant voyages were well supplied with guns and carried large crews. They had their gunners and armourers, and the crews were drilled at quarters. Often enough they were overpowered, and all who escaped death were swept into captivity.

The Privy Council received every year a long list of piteous complaints and appeals from unfortunate men who were in the bagnios of Algiers. The charitable were periodically called on to subscribe for the ransom of captives. Nor was Algiers the only or even the worst place of imprisonment to which his ill-luck might lead the sailor. The fate of Captain Nathaniel Courthope and of the factors at Amboyna shows that the Dutch of the Spice Islands could be as ferocious as the renegades of the Mediterranean. Even when Spain was most anxious to be on good terms with the King of England, the Inquisition seized every chance of laying its hands on heretics. Still, in defiance of death, wounds, and imprisonment, English sailors rushed into every trade with such success, that the commerce of the country increased very greatly between the death of Elizabeth and the outbreak of the Civil War. Being left almost without protection by the Royal fleet, they protected themselves. They were rarely taken without a fight, and in many cases they resisted with success. Accounts of these feats were published, and one, a

particularly good specimen of its kind, was dedicated to Prince Henry, and rhymed by Taylor, the Water Poet. It tells how in 1616 the 'Dolphin' of London beat off a little squadron of Algerines on the coast of Sardinia. The pirates surrounded and boarded her. At their head were two English renegades. The pirates were in overwhelming force, but they attacked in detail, and were repulsed one after another. At last, when two of their vessels had been well riddled by the 'Dolphin's' guns, when the valiant merchant ship was on fire, but her crew still resisted, 'choosing rather to die than yield, as it is still the nature and condition of all Englishmen,' the Algerines drew off. The 'Dolphin's' 'boatswain (seeing them fly) most undauntedly with a whistle dared them to the skirmish if so they durst'. But they durst not, and the 'Dolphin,' badly cut up as she was, crawled into safety under the Sardinian batteries. In the East Indies the fighting was incessant and merciless. Sir Henry Middleton blockaded Aden in revenge for some violent proceedings of the pasha's. A squadron of the Company's ships helped Shah Abbas of Persia to take Ormuz from the Portuguese, who were our obstinate enemies in those regions. The history of the Company's first voyages is full of accounts of actions with the fleets of this power, in which no quarter was given. Later on, when Portugal had ceased to be formidable, began the long quarrel with Holland, which was equally furious but less successful.

All this was very irregular, undoubtedly, but it was capital training. It familiarised men with war, and accustomed them to submit to discipline. The crews

of the 'Dolphin' and of the Indiamen must have had the root of the matter in them. It was well that they should, for they had long scores to clear off with Portuguese, Spaniards, and Dutchmen. Under a resolute Government and vigorous leaders, they were about to have an opportunity to fight out what was peculiarly their quarrel.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PURSUIT OF RUPERT.

Blake's first naval services were against a domestic enemy. It fell to him to crush the feeble remnants of the Royalist party. After the fall of Colchester and the defeat of the Duke of Hamilton at Preston, the King's followers were completely conquered in England, but though driven from the mainland they still continued to fight on the sea. Carteret and Greenvil held Jersey and the Scilly Islands. From their ports cruisers sailed to prey on the commerce of the rebels, that is to say, of all England. In the ports of Holland Prince Rupert commanded a remnant of the squadron which had revolted against the Parliament in the previous year. Most of the ships, and a large majority of the men, had been induced to return to their duty, or to fall back into their treason (either phrase can be used according to the point of view), by the Earl of Warwick. Three large vessels, the 'Convertine,' the 'Antelope,' the 'Swallow,' and four frigates remained in the hands of the King's friends. After much wrangling between the Duke of York, who was nominally Lord High Admiral, and the Prince of Wales or the Prince's servants; after fights among themselves, futile efforts

to help the imprisoned King, riots in Helvoet Sluys with the Dutch, and spurts of fighting with the Parliament's blockading squadron, a compromise had been arrived at by the divided Royalists. The poor remnant of the squadron which was to have reconquered England was put under the command of Prince Rupert, to be used for the King's service, with a reservation of the Duke of York's rights as Lord High Admiral. Only one use could be made of this force. Even the most sanguine of the Royalist refugees could not hope to produce any impression on the power of the Parliament with three 'capital ships' and four small cruisers, manned by broken men and indifferently equipped by expedients of every kind. If this squadron could not do anything else, however, it could plunder, and its prizes could be sold for the benefit of the exiled Court. The monarchical governments of the Continent were not as yet sufficiently afraid of the Commonwealth to refuse Charles the use of their ports. With a folly scarcely to be justified by their extreme penury, Charles and his advisers decided to offend the whole trading community of England by putting themselves on a level with the pirates of Algiers. Their enterprise was delayed for a time by the very penury it was designed to relieve. The squadron was to make money, but money was needed to equip the squadron. Prince Rupert got over this difficulty in a masterly manner. He sold the guns of the 'Antelope,' and fitted out two of his frigates with the proceeds. These cruisers, the 'Guinea' frigate, of 300 tons and thirty guns, under Captain Allen (one of Charles's admirals after the Restoration), and the 'Roebuck,' of 120 tons and fourteen guns, Captain Marshall, sailed

from Helvoet Sluys. In a few days they returned with a collier valued at 800*l*. and a Yarmouth ship. With these firstfruits of their industry the Royalist officers equipped the other ships, and in January of 1649 Rupert stood to sea with his seven vessels and the prize. His first stroke of business was innocent enough. He gave convoy down the Channel to some Dutch merchantmen, and then steered for Kinsale, where the King's flag was still flying. From that time till the end of his wild cruise, his friends heard little from Rupert the Devil, as his sister Sophia calls him in a letter intercepted by the Parliament.

The loud outcries of the merchants would soon have forced the Parliament to take active measures against Rupert, even if a regard for its own interests had not been enough to drive it into vigorous exertions. Some time had to pass, however, before a sufficient squadron could be got ready for sea. The mutiny of the previous summer had greatly disorganised the service, and the rapid changes of the second Civil War had thrown the whole Government out of gear. In 1649 the Parliament had to begin by establishing a naval administration. An Admiralty Committee, of which Sir Harry Vane was the ablest and the most industrious member, was formed to work under the Council of State. In keeping with its general practice, the Parliament seems to have attempted to put even the fleet at sea under the command of a committee. Popham, Blake, and Deane were expected to act together, and even to sail in the same ship. The necessities of the service made it impossible for all three to keep together, but throughout 1649 Blake is found acting either with Popham or

with Deane. Their commission, issued in February, was in the wildest terms, and was accompanied by instructions worded with all the vigour and precision which distinguished the orders of the Council of State when the work in hand was the suppression of the Royalists. They were told, with much official detail, to go anywhere and do anything they might find necessary 'to oppose and suppress whoever maintains the title of Charles Stuart, eldest son to the late King, or any of his issue claiming a title to the Crown'.

The first thing to be done was to take measures of precaution against another mutiny. On March 3 the admirals had orders to prepare a 'form of engagement' to bind the officers and mariners to 'this Parliament,' and the support of a Government without King or House of Lords. Then came the long business of fitting the squadron for sea. Two months were spent in this task, during which time Blake and Deane were continually writing to the Admiralty Committee for cases of pistols, hatchets, cables, anchors, flags, or men. In the middle of all this official correspondence is one letter which may be said to be, by comparison, personal and interesting. On April 3 the admirals inform the Committee that Colonel Blake, as he was still called, had sent to Lyme for Rich. Squire. Jonathan Pook, and Jas. Pelsor to join their flagship, the 'Triumph'. It is hardly a guess that these were men known to Blake in the old days of the siege as tall fellows and good men of their hands, such as an officer in need of stout and trustworthy followers would like to have by him in trying times. By the middle of April the fleet was in the Downs, and in May it was in Plymouth

Sound. Blake, who was a loyal Bridgewater man, and who always bought his own stores in his native town, would get his favourite Somersetshire bread and cheese and beer very conveniently at Plymouth.

During the summer of 1649 Blake and Deane were engaged in the dreary work of blockading on the Irish coast. The diaries of Sir William Penn, who saw much of that service, can still be read, and they are a speaking testimony to the tedium of this, the most wearisome part of the languid Irish wars. Rupert kept his ships carefully in Kinsale harbour, not having 'devil' enough in him to try the frantic adventure of attacking the strong and well-appointed Parliamentary squadron at sea. He had his troubles, but they came mainly from the land. The crews of the King's ships grew discontented with idleness and want of pay. Worse than the mutinous conduct of his own men was the downfall of the Royal cause in Ireland. The victory of Michael Jones outside of Dublin, and Cromwell's dreadful march, made it clear that Kinsale would not long be tenable. With falling fortunes came their usual consequence in Ireland, treason and divisions. Rupert found, or professed to find, that he could not trust the officer in charge of the fort at Kinsale. He therefore seized it himself. The fort would have stood him in little stead if Cromwell had come down on Kinsale while Blake and Deane were off the port. Bad weather came to his assistance. The autumn storms compelled the Parliamentary officers to withdraw from the dangerous coast, and Rupert slipped out with his seven ships. It would have been too rash to make for the Channel Islands, though Carteret still held them for the King, and the Prince accordingly

sailed for the coast of Portugal. In November he reached Lisbon, a fatal guest, bringing with him several English prizes captured off the Berlings by his brother Maurice.

Blake's services during this summer can only be guessed at. A blockade has but a colourless history. In November a letter from Deane reports that 'my partner Blake' is on the coast of Munster, with the 'Guinea' frigate and the 'Nonsuch'. He must have maintained his reputation if he did not increase it, for in the course of October he received an offer from one who well knew how to choose men for command. By a Parliamentary order in that month, he was, 'at the instance of the Lord General of Ireland,' Oliver Cromwell, offered the choice of keeping his sea command or taking a Major-Generalship on shore. If he selected the latter post he was to have help in raising a regiment. The offer was either declined or recalled, for Parliament soon had need for his services on blue water. The news of Rupert's presence on the coast of Portugal induced the Council of State to fit out a fleet for the south, and Blake was chosen for the command in December of 1649. Popham being needed in the Channel, and Deane being ill, he was to go alone.

Another period of preparation preceded the next campaign. During the last month of 1649 and the first of 1650, Blake was hard at work fitting his squadron for sea. The rendezvous was in Stokes Bay, where he met Popham, who was to keep an eye on the Channel, and the two rapidly settled the details of the service. In the previous summer, the Council of State had been somewhat doubtful as to its power of keeping up a strong

naval force for long, and had been urgent on the admirals to do something towards 'breaking the head and pulling up the roots of the enemy's marine strength in Prince Rupert'. These doubts had disappeared by the end of the year. New ships had been equipped, and armed merchantmen had been levied in some numbers. In March, 1650, the Parliament had forty-seven war-ships and twenty hired merchant ships in commission, over and above the seventeen war-ships and two fire-ships or ketches blockading Lisbon. By the middle of February Blake was on his way south, and it was well known that he was commissioned for determined service.

A Royal agent in England, whose letter was intercepted, reports on February 20 that Blake is at sea with fourteen ships, and will 'renew the business of Helvoet Sluys in any prince's harbour'. 'The business of Helvoet Sluys' was Warwick's attempt to destroy the mutinous squadron of 1648 in Dutch waters—a very high-handed proceeding. The Royalist spy was only repeating a matter of common knowledge when he informed his friends that the Parliamentary officer was ordered to strike hard, not only at Rupert, but at any power which allowed him to use its harbours. On January 7 the Council of State had issued 'additional instructions for the generals of the fleet for the southern expedition'. Nothing could be more explicit. 'Now,' so ran the peremptory words, 'this present fleet is sent forth for the intents following—*viz.*, the suppressing of pirates, advantage of trade, encouraging of merchants, and securing their shipping at sea; also to pursue, seize, scatter, fight with, or destroy all the ships of the revolted fleet.' Sink, drown, and destroy, is the burden

of the whole despatch. No doubt was left as to the course to be followed with foreigners guilty of too much friendship for Rupert. They were to be 'sunk, burnt, and destroyed,' but, and the qualification throws some light on the nature of naval warfare in those times, they were not to be killed in cold blood. For the rest, the Parliament claimed to have inherited all the rights of the King of England. Blake was ordered to insist on the salute due to the sovereigns of the seas. He was to call on all foreign ships to lower their topsails to the flag of England, always providing he was strong enough to enforce obedience. If not, he might pass over the offence, but was to report the names of the contumacious foreigners to the Council of State, so that they might be brought thereunto 'on a more fitting occasion'. The Commonwealth, though it did not ask its officers to try the impossible, was not one of those Governments which decline to take responsibility. On April 13 the Admiralty Committee writes more 'further instructions' to Blake, putting its views as to the course to be taken with the King of Portugal beyond all question of a doubt. He was ordered to give his Faithful Majesty to understand that no right of asylum would be recognised in his waters as far as Rupert was concerned. The Admiralty Committee quoted 'Puffendorf and Grotius' to show that the Prince and his squadron were not capable of neutrality. 'Quod piratæ et latrones qui civitatem non faciunt jure gentium jussi non possunt,' and seeing that they were 'hostes humani generis' were to be knocked on the head, and properly rooted out wherever found. If any foreign prince chose to protect such fellows, he did it at his peril.

In the first days of March, if not in the last days of February, Blake reached his cruising ground off Lisbon, and here he remained until the end of the year. During this period he had abundant opportunity of showing not only his vigilance, but that readiness to strike on provocation which Nelson called political courage. The pursuit of Rupert grew rapidly into an informal war with Portugal. This war sprang almost inevitably out of the very complicated relations of all the parties to the quarrel. The position of the Portuguese king was indeed difficult. John of Brágañza, the representative of an illegitimate branch of the house of Avis, had been as it were forced on to the throne of Portugal by the ambition of his wife, who had compelled him ten years before to have the courage to profit by the revolt against Spain. He was a narrow-minded and timid man, very ill fitted for a place requiring both nerve and judgment. Spain had not yet recognised the independence of Portugal, and was known to be preparing for an attempt to enforce its rights to preserve the monarchy left by Philip II. Feeble as Spain was, it was still stronger than Portugal. As yet, John of Braganza had no ally. When therefore he became suddenly entangled in the civil strife of Englishmen, it behoved him to look warily to his going, lest he should find that he had offended the stronger side, and so brought upon himself the hostility of a State which could give very material help to Spain. In November, 1649, when Rupert's ships entered the Tagus, it was not yet certain that the Parliament would be ultimately victorious. The crowning mercy of Worcester had not settled that question. John might therefore naturally

wish to keep on good terms with the Stuarts. His sympathies, too, would carry him in that direction. Though the chief of a rebellion he claimed to represent the indefeasible rights of a royal line, and the execution of Charles I. must have seemed as horrible a piece of wickedness to him as to the most firmly established sovereign on the Continent. Charles II. was in his eyes already the true sovereign of England. Moreover, when the Royal squadron appeared off the Tagus in November, 1649, there seemed reason to believe that it might be found useful. The Parliament was known to be sending envoys to Spain, and it was natural for John to see in this an attempt to secure an alliance with his worst enemy. He might well suspect the rebellious Parliament of a wish to secure recognition from an old State by helping in his ruin. Finally, and this cannot have been the weakest of the motives which influenced him, the Parliament's ships were far away, with enemies at home still unsubdued. The Royalist squadron was off his port, with prizes to be sold, its wants urging it on, its matches burning, and a leader with a well-established reputation for want of scruple at its head. If a refuge was refused, it might very possibly avenge itself by plundering Portuguese commerce, under the pretext that Portugal had become the ally of the Commonwealth.

In an evil hour for himself, John of Braganza opened his harbour and arsenal to the refugees from Kinsale. Rupert was able to sell his prizes, and divide the proceeds between his master in Holland and the refitting of his squadron. Before it was ready, Blake's sails were seen from Peniche, and the King of Portugal found

himself between the devil and the deep sea. The Parliamentary officer insisted at once on the surrender of Rupert's ships, and on his own right to enter the Tagus. The King refused both requests. He could not submit to the ignominy of giving up his guests to be treated as pirates, while to have admitted Blake would have simply been to invite a repetition of the business of Helvoet Sluys. The actions of Tunis and Santa Cruz show how ready Blake was to attack fortifications where there was any possibility of success, and if the thing had been feasible he would doubtless have shown the King of Portugal by diplomatic blows and knocks that 'piratæ et latrones' are not capable of neutrality; but, like Drake at an earlier period, he considered an attempt to force the heavily fortified entrance of so swift a river as the Tagus too rash. He therefore anchored outside.

A war of stratagems now began between the two squadrons which lay within sight of one another. In the intervals of sending long documents to the King to prove one another pirates and enemies of the human race, the two admirals made such attacks on each other as their confined positions allowed. Parliamentary officers persuaded Rupert's men to desert. Royalist officers attacked Blake's boats when they came on shore for water. Rupert accused Blake of laying a plot to kidnap him, and retaliated by trying to blow up his flagship. A primitive but undoubted torpedo, made of a 'bomb ball in a double-headed barrel with a lock in the bowels to give fire to a quick match,' was to be taken alongside the 'George' in a fruit boat by a sailor in a Portuguese dress. The hasty use of an English word, we can guess

what it was, by the travestied Englishman excited suspicion, and the infernal machine was seized. During all this time the King of Portugal sat by in feeble impotence, and was assailed by both sides with arguments and threats. Each of the foreigners too had his party in the Portuguese Court. The Queen supported Rupert; a body of his wiser courtiers, who had begun to see where the balance of strength lay, were eager to have peace made with the Commonwealth. They would have sent Rupert to Execution Dock with the utmost equanimity.

The King, surrounded by factions and without fleet or money, had no power to exact respect from either of the strangers who had come to fight their quarrels out in his waters. The most he could do was to keep them from coming to actual blows in the Tagus. Blake was authorised not to tolerate even tacit hostility, and he soon had an opportunity of striking the Portuguese a shrewd blow. The Portuguese naval power had sunk so low that they were compelled to freight English ships to carry cargoes bound for their own colonies. When the Brazil fleet, with a very ill-advised confidence, put to sea, those of its vessels which were of English nationality were impressed by Blake for the service of the Commonwealth, and the Portuguese cargoes were sequestered. This, as the English admiral informed the King, was only meant as a warning, and worse would follow if Rupert was not at once expelled. He threatened to seize the home-coming Brazil fleet which was due by the end of summer.

This attack and its accompanying threat roused even the feeble Court of Portugal. A great show was

made of taking steps to avenge the insult. Ships were equipped, and Rupert was asked for help. The Prince was as ready as usual for the fray, though his crews had been much weakened by desertion, but nothing came of it all. The Portuguese ships would not fight, and Rupert's could not unless supported. 'M. La Touche has been cutting capers outside Sepet' is a phrase which occurs frequently in Nelson's letters from the blockading fleet off Toulon, and with the necessary change of names it describes this and the following sallies of Rupert's ships from the Tagus. He could not without manifest insanity venture far from the protection of the forts, while Blake could not risk his fleet under their guns. The whole thing ended in an ineffectual cannonade.

In the course of September something very effectual was done. Blake had been reinforced by Popham with eight ships, and had received orders to seize all Portuguese goods at sea. He therefore kept his word to King John, and attacked the home-coming Brazil fleet five miles off the coast of Portugal. One was sunk, and a round dozen were captured, all richly laden with sugar and other colonial produce. The resistance seems to have been of the feeblest. This experience convinced John of Braganza that it was decidedly less dangerous to offend Rupert than to quarrel with the masters of England, and he began to make his peace in earnest. The Royalists were forced, or bribed by gifts of stores, to take themselves off, and they rid King John of their very costly presence by sailing for the Straits in October.

This second escape of Rupert's squadron from a blockaded port was probably due to the foul state of

the Parliament ships. In those days, before the value of copper sheeting had been discovered, no vessel could keep the sea for long without getting so covered with barnacles as to lose its sailing powers. When Blake had given the Portuguese their lesson, he was doubtless glad enough to make for a friendly port, and so proceeded to the Spanish port of San Lucar de Barrameda to careen. Perhaps, too, it was thought wise to meet the King of Portugal half-way, and spare him the humiliation of surrendering his guests. However that may have been, Rupert escaped. He ran through the Straits and sailed up the coast of Spain, appealing to the King as a nominal ally of his master for help, but with the ultimate intention of making for Toulon. As the historian of the voyage puts it, 'We take the confines of the Mediterranean for our harbour, poverty and despair being companions, and revenge our guide'. The appearance of Rupert in Spanish waters did something to secure attention for Clarendon and Cottington, who were acting as his master's ambassadors in Madrid, but he was not allowed to enter any harbour. His career here was short. After destroying some English merchant ships at Estepona and Malaga, and capturing one, the 'Marmaduke' of London, after a sharp fight at sea, he began to cruise between Cape de Gat and Palos. Meanwhile Blake, having scraped his ships, started in pursuit. In November, 1650, he came up with the bulk of the Royalist squadron off Carthagena and attacked them at once. There was no battle deserving the name. Rupert had been compelled to impress men from English merchant ships, and they had no stomach for the fight in such a cause. Blake had little difficulty in capturing

or driving on shore the whole squadron. When the work was done, it must have been a grievous disappointment to Blake to find that Rupert was not in the fleet. He was cruising when the disaster happened off Formentera, and had escaped again. From this point, however, he vanishes from the life of Robert Blake. His arrival at Toulon, where he found his brother, his departure from the Mediterranean, his long stay on the coast of Africa, his attempts to persuade his companions to turn buccaneers, his quarrels with his followers, his perils among the Azores, his futile visit to the West Indies, his final escape in the tornado off the Virgin Isles, in which Maurice went down with man and mouse, and his safe arrival with one storm-battered ship at Nantes in 1653, cannot be told here.

With the action off Carthagena, Blake's work in the Mediterranean was done for the present. He left Penn behind with a squadron to protect British shipping, and brought back the bulk of the fleet to the Channel. One piece of service he did before the action at Carthagena which must be noted, for it was of a kind it fell to his lot to do continuously, and on a larger scale, for the rest of his life. The French had profited by the unprotected state of English shipping during the latter part of the Civil War to plunder traders to the Mediterranean, and had lately been suspected of an intention to help Rupert. During 1650 the Levant Company had made many and bitter complaints to the Council of State of the loss inflicted on them by French piracy. The time had gone by when the English Government was compelled to tolerate such outrages, or to leave merchant ships to protect themselves. Its admiral, who

well knew that he would be supported, even if he did not act by express orders, determined to teach the French a lesson as sharp as that which he had just taught the Portuguese. When in the Straits, on his way to attack Rupert, he fell in with four of their vessels, and captured them by way of reprisal. The officer in command of the French ships is reported, when summoned on board Blake's flagship, to have refused to surrender without resistance, and to have been told to go back and make the best fight he could. It does seem not to have been particularly good. The ships were taken, their cargoes were impounded, and the French Government was left to digest its warning.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE CHANNEL, AND AT WHITEHALL.

BLAKE'S crews must have heard the welcome cry of 'sand and shells' from the man at the lead, which told them that they were again in Channel soundings, in the beginning of February, 1651. He had been one year absent, and had been cruising continuously. In itself this was a considerable feat in the seventeenth century, when the hardiest seamen thought it almost impossible to keep the sea with a squadron of large ships in winter. His efforts to carry out his orders had not been wholly successful, for Rupert was still at large, though in a crippled condition, but he had, none the less, done much. Portugal had been compelled to seek peace on terms advantageous to England. Spain was shut to the Royalists, and France had been punished for her seamen's over-haste in profiting by the supposed naval weakness of the English. More important even than his services in actual conflict had been Blake's success in organising a thoroughly efficient squadron, and winning for himself, and through him for his Government, the loyal devotion of the seamen. Before the year was out, the Commonwealth had an opportunity of showing how thoroughly it trusted his influence over the men

who manned the fleet. Parliament was not backward in acknowledging its debt. On February 13, 'upon a relation made by General Blake of the safe arrival of that part of the Parliament fleet which is under his command, and of the wonderful appearance of the powerful hand of God with him in his services at sea,' he was voted the thanks of the House for his great and faithful service, and duly thanked by Mr. Speaker. At the same time, and according to an admirable custom, he was voted a substantial testimony of gratitude in the form of 1000*l.*, and the Council of State was ordered to see to the present payment of this sum. Present payment seems to have been more difficult than voting, for exactly one month later the Admiralty Committee was inquiring 'where the 1000*l.* ordered by Parliament to Colonel Blake may be had,' but as a warrant was duly issued by the Commissioners of Prizes, the reward was doubtless finally paid.

Votes of thanks, or even of 1000*l.*, are less trustworthy signs of confidence than immediate reappointment to an important command. Blake had the third, as well as the two first. On March 15 he was selected to take charge of the fleet for the Irish Seas and the Isle of Man. The names of the ships told off to form his command are not without interest in themselves. They were the 'Phœnix,' 'Providence,' 'Fox,' 'Tenth Whelp,' 'Mayflower,' 'Hind,' 'Truelove,' 'Convertine,' 'Little President,' 'Constant Warwick,' 'Convert,' and the galliot 'Hoy'. For special service on the Irish coast were the 'Portsmouth,' 'Swiftsure,' 'Concord,' 'Fellowship,' and 'Hector'. Names of ships are curiously permanent in the English navy. We have

still a 'Swiftsure' and a 'Hector,' descended through a long line of fighting craft from those and earlier days. It is interesting, too, to find a 'Mayflower' in Blake's squadron. Was she the Argo of New England (ships were long-lived then), or another merchant ship of the same name pressed for the fleet? We have seen a 'Convertine' in Rupert's squadron. Probably this was the same retaken. There was a 'Fox' in Nelson's squadron at Tenerife. He heard the cries of her crew as she sunk, riddled by the fire of the Spanish batteries, while he was being carried back to the 'Theseus' in his galley, desperately wounded, and stopped, regardless of his own sufferings, to pick up the drowning men. The 'Tenth Whelp' was one of ten sister ships built by Charles I., and christened first, second, third, etc. The 'Constant Warwick' ought, if the naval historian knew what he was about, to have a history to herself. She was the first English frigate. Originally built as a private war-ship by the Puritanical and piratical Earl of Warwick, she was bought by Charles, and took a conspicuous part in the services of the English fleet till far into the reign of Charles II., when Mr. Pepys had to point out how she had been reduced from a prime sailer to a slug by overgunning.

Blake's flag had not been flying for a fortnight when he was at sea again in hot haste, to do important service and avert a great danger. On April 1, orders were hurrying to him from the Council of State to finish the business he knew of before he went hence. This was the reduction of the Scilly Isles, still held by Sir John Greenvil for the King. The sudden urgency of the Council was due to the receipt of information that

Tromp was on his way to the same waters, and their orders contain a warning of the great storm which was to burst in the Channel a year later. Sir John and his Royalist followers had begun to drop into something very like piracy. They had been capturing Dutch vessels as well as English. The States were not likely to tolerate this sort of thing and therefore Tromp was sent with a squadron to bring Greenvil to his senses, and perhaps to seize Scilly. So most Englishmen believed at least, and certainly the possession of a fortified post at the mouth of the Channel would be of infinite use to Holland. Now the Council of State had need to see that no such thing happened, and so Blake was hurried off, and Ascue was commanded to join him. The orders of the Council were as usual masterpieces of decision and clearness of statement. Blake was to push on the business of Scilly, and if Tromp interferes, 'you are,' they say, 'to require him to desist, and if he persists, to use the best ways and means you can to enforce him, and in all things to preserve the honour and interest of this nation'. In less official language, Blake was to blow the Dutchmen out of the water if they came too near Scilly, but as the Council did not wish for a war with Holland, he was to give Tromp full leave to take satisfaction on Sir John Greenvil, provided he could do so without prejudice to the Commonwealth. If he caught the Royalists at sea he might make them walk the plank, but he must not hang them on shore in Scilly.

Tromp, finding he had not to do with the Government which had tamely allowed him to attack Orquendo's galleons under the very guns of Dover twelve years

before, kept at a respectful distance. Blake, Ascue, and a military officer, Colonel Clarke, who had been detached for the service by Desborow, spent April and part of May in subduing Sir John Greenvil. On the 24th of the latter month the Royalist officer surrendered, and that danger was averted.

Besides covering Colonel Clarke's attack on the forts at St. Mary and St. Agnes, Blake had it in charge to stop any succour the Earl of Derby's vessels in the Isle of Man might attempt to send to the 'King of Scotland'. By the beginning of August this had become a very pressing question indeed. In the last days of July Charles Stuart, finding his position at Stirling had been rendered untenable by Cromwell's flank march through Fife, suddenly broke up his camp and marched rapidly south. On August 6 he crossed the Border, and then a stirring month began for the Council of State. Among the innumerable orders they poured forth all over England during the Royalist march to Worcester, there could not but be several addressed to Blake. One of these contained perhaps the very last instructions which would be expected by a modern admiral. On August 9 he was informed that a commission had been issued, giving him command of all the troops in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset, during the absence of Major-General Desborow. To Blake and his contemporaries the choice of a commander to keep the Royalists in check while the bulk of the Parliamentary garrison was drawn off for service in the field can have caused no surprise whatever. The interchange of sea and land commands was common enough, and nobody could be fitter for the post than an officer who had seen service

all over the West. As a matter of fact the commission never took effect. The death of Popham deprived the Parliament of a trusted officer to watch the Downs, and Blake was immediately chosen to fill his place. Three days after being appointed to command on shore, he received instructions to take over the fleet, 'to keep those affairs in good order, and prevent any impression that may be made on the seamen by misrepresentation of affairs'. He was, in his own phrase, used at another crisis, to 'keep foreigners from fooling us'. The Council of State were afraid that efforts might be made to help the Royalists from abroad, and doubtless much more disturbed by thoughts of the possible consequences of another mutiny. Blake hoisted his flag in the 'Victory,' and took his station in the Downs. Here he remained on the look-out for foreigners seeking to fool us, and Royalist agents trying to stir up a mutiny. Neither one nor the other appeared. The crowning mercy of September 3 gave the Royalist party its death-wound, and a few weeks later the 'Victory' was put out of commission.

One last piece of service Blake had to do against his own countrymen. Within a few months he would be fighting for England and against the foreigner, and gaining the admiration of Royalist and Roundhead alike, but in the meantime there was one more blow to be struck in the Civil War. Sir George Carteret held Jersey for the King, and there was, as there had been in the case of Scilly, a danger of Dutch intervention. An expedition was despatched in October to capture this last Royalist hold. Blake was in command of the squadron, and Colonel Hayne led the troops. They had

no easy task before them. Carteret had some 4000 men in the island, and his forts were capable of defence, but hard as it might be to beat him, it was harder to get at him. Landing troops in the face of an active enemy is always a risky operation, and when it has to be performed on a rocky coast during a stormy autumn, it is very likely to end in disaster. The New Model was capable of this, and even greater things. When Blake reached the coasts of Jersey he found the weather too bad to allow of any attempt at landing for days. At last, when the horses of the expedition seemed on the point of being utterly destroyed by starvation and rough usage, it was decided to make a push for the shore. The storm had moderated sufficiently to allow of the boats being lowered. They were soon filled with men, and were driven on the beach. It was nearly midnight. The Royalists, who must have seen the squadron hanging off the coast all day, were on the alert, and their horse fell fiercely on the Parliamentary soldiers as they leapt from the boats. The men were mostly up to their necks in water, and in the darkness and confusion were at a great disadvantage, but they belonged to a force which 'truly was never beaten at all,' and they fought their way on. After half an hour of sharp struggle the Royalist horse broke and fled.

Sir George Carteret was convinced by this defeat of his inability to keep the open field, and retired at once into Elizabeth Castle. The minor forts fell rapidly, Mount Orgueil surrendered to Hayne, and Blake took up a position outside St. Aubyn Bay, to block the governor up in his fortress. If Sir George had been really minded to escape, the Parliamentary admiral

might have watched in vain. Elizabeth Castle stands among the shallows and reefs of the Jersey coast; boatmen accustomed to sail among them from their youth upwards could easily have carried the garrison over to the coast of France by detachments under cover of night. Lady Carteret and some thirty civilians did escape in this very way. Her husband might have blown the castle up, and have got off himself after holding out for months, but he had good reason, in the shape of an estate, not to push things to an extremity. The Royalist cause would not have been benefited by his private ruin, and he had done enough for honour. At the end of 1651 he surrendered on good terms, and there ended the fight for or against the Stuarts, as far as Blake was concerned.

After two years of nearly incessant cruising he had rest—the kind of rest which takes the form of a change of work—for a very few weeks. In the interval between subduing Jersey and hoisting his flag again in the Downs to meet Tromp in February, 1652, he must have been back in London, in his place in Parliament. His name appears in the list of the Ordnance and Admiralty Committees in December, but this is no proof of his return from sea. In January, however, he was appointed with others to hear the ambassadors of the Dukes of Tuscany and Oldenburg 'in the matted Guard Chamber,' and his name was added, with Mr. Martin's, to the general Committee of Foreign Affairs. These were duties to be attended to directly, and in person. The business of the Duke of Tuscany, which fills a good few pages of the Calendar of State Papers about this time, came to be put straight by Blake in a quite unparliamentary

way later on. Ferdinand de' Medici had quarrels with the Levant Company, or they with him, and moreover he had his share in the great Rupert question. One day a final settlement was to be made at Leghorn; for the present Blake heard the ambassadors, and then had to see to the arrangement of a nearer and more pressing matter. His command of the fleet was renewed for nine months on February 25, and in the early days of the next month the Commonwealth was pointing out to him the extraordinary occasion there was for getting a fleet to sea at once, and he was visiting the Thames dockyards with a general commission to suspend indolent or incompetent officials, and press on the work. He was preparing for the Dutch war.

Blake had now reached the end of the second stage in his career. The defence of Taunton had marked him out as an able and trustworthy officer. There had been enough in his services during the three arduous years between February of 1649 and February of 1652 to show that he possessed the qualities required in a master of the great art of war He had won no striking victory, and had even then been partially unsuccessful in some of his operations, but he had in the main been victorious. Rupert was still at large, but he was lurking with a diminishing force on the coasts of Africa. The Portuguese and French had been smartly chastised, the Royalist garrisons had been swept from the Channel, and what was more important than any of these things, the fleet had been thoroughly reorganised, and attached to the new Government. To say that it had been gained to the service of the Rump would be an inaccurate way of stating the case, but it was prepared to serve the rulers of England for the time being, and to think that

its first duty was to keep foreigners from interfering in our concerns.

From the end of 1651 there is a distinct change in Blake's position. During his earlier sea services, he was simply the colleague of Popham and Deane. The Parliament seems to have considered Popham the most important of its three admirals and generals at sea. After his death Blake, who had now a long list of services to show, became incontestably the leading man in maritime affairs, and one of the foremost Englishmen of his time. He was joined in command with others during the ensuing war, but it was always with a certain superiority, not indicated by any higher nominal rank, but by the deference shown to his opinion. The almost absolute power given him over the dockyards shows what profound confidence was felt in his administrative faculty. In the following May he received another proof of the trust felt in him by the Council of State. Blank commissions were sent to him in the Downs, to be filled up with the names of the officers he preferred to have under him as vice and rear admirals. He was to fill them after conferring with the Lord General and Mr. Bond, who were also engaged in urging on the naval preparations against the Dutch, but it is obvious that a large discretion was left in his hands.

There is one question about Blake which is not without interest, and which may be as conveniently asked here as elsewhere. Was he, whose name is associated with Nelson's in the mind of all Englishmen, ever in the proper sense of the word a seaman? It seems impossible that a country gentleman, and colonel of horse or foot, who never went to sea until he was fifty, can ever have attained to more than a superficial knowledge of

an art only to be mastered by much and early practice. 'Sailorman' in the way Anson, Hawke, or Collingwood were sailormen, he never can have been. He never went aloft, or kept a watch, or laid a ship's course, or commanded a boat in his life. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the man who met Tromp on equal terms was deficient in the knowledge required to handle a fleet. The truth probably is, that he had acquired in the course of his cruisings on the coast of Ireland and Portugal very much that knowledge of sea affairs which is often acquired by a clever admiralty lawyer who is also a yachtsman. It would not have sufficed to enable him to take a trading brig from Hull to Leghorn, but it was enough to enable him to command a fleet. As admiral he had a large staff of officers to carry out his orders. Penn, Lawson, and many others who served him were seamen, and to them he left the execution of the movements he might think necessary. He knew what ought to be done, and had seamanship enough to see that his subordinates did it. That he had the moral and intellectual qualities which have more to do with making a great commander than technical knowledge—a fact much overlooked by professional men—is beyond question. If Lord John Russell had indeed taken command of the Channel fleet, it is possible that he might, with the help of a good flag captain, have extricated himself from the difficulties of the position with unexpected credit. With what knowledge he had acquired in a short period of his middle life, and a firm conviction that 'Expedition was the soul of all military affairs,' Blake did succeed in defeating the most famous admiral and the most practised fleet then existing in Europe.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WAR WITH HOLLAND.

THE quarrel between England and the States had been ripening for years before it finally exploded in open war. From early in the reign of James I. a number of irritating questions had been in debate between the two countries. There were diplomatic causes of dispute in abundance which might have led to an open rupture if James had been less a lover of peace, or Charles had not been so weak. These political matters had, however, done less to anger Englishmen than a variety of commercial and maritime quarrels. In the seventeenth century the Dutch were in a condition of advancing, and, as Englishmen felt, offensive prosperity. Their carrying trade was flourishing in a way which seemed monstrous to a people who held it the first duty of a Government to protect native industry. Their busses fished openly in English waters, and refused obstinately to pay the tax of the tenth herring claimed by the King. Whole fleets of these craft took up their station in English waters under protection of an armed convoy. In the East Indies the Dutch and English, after banding together to oust the Portuguese, had come to blows over their booty. The Dutch East India Company had

driven the English from the Spice Islands. We had not yet found that they had thereby done us the service of compelling us to turn to the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, and lay the foundations of our Eastern Empire. In 1650 the loss was fresh, and men did not forget that the massacre of Amboyna and the lonely death of Nathaniel Courthope in Puleroon were still unavenged. To no small extent the Dutch had taken the place of the Spaniards as the object of the English sailor's hatred. The open partiality of the Orange party for the Royalists had added another grievance, while in 1651 the fears of some enterprise against the Channel Islands had strengthened the already existing causes of quarrel.

The Parliament had, as soon as it was at leisure to attend to domestic affairs, taken measures to correct the real or supposed grievances of the trading community by passing the famous Navigation Act.[1] While the anger of Holland at this sharp blow was still blazing, the Parliament had made proposals to the States for a union between the Commonwealths. This request for a resignation of national life was refused in the natural course of things. The murder of Dr. Dorislaus by Royalist refugees at the Hagne, and the cold reception given to Oliver St. John, the Commonwealth's envoy, had added to other causes of irritation till, by the beginning of 1652, both countries were in a thoroughly pugnacious frame of mind, and only an accident was

[1] The Navigation Act, first passed by the Long Parliament and re-enacted after the Restoration, forbade the importation of goods into England except in English vessels, or the vessels of the country producing them. It was aimed at the carrying trade of the Dutch.

required to bring on a war. It is in the last degree unlikely, with all these stimulants spiriting the two peoples on to fight, that peace could have been permanently maintained; but the collision was hurried on by the Governments. Both were equally active in asserting their wish for a firm alliance, and in pushing on their naval armaments. The States had Tromp at sea with a strong squadron, and the Parliament was straining every nerve to strengthen the fleet under Blake in the Downs.

There was one subject of dispute which under these circumstances might have been calculated to set the guns of the rival admirals firing of their own mere motion. The Kings of England had for long—it may almost be said from the earliest times—claimed a species of sovereignty over the narrow seas. Their officers had always been under orders to insist on a salute from foreign ships as a recognition of this right. This mark of respect had been insisted on and received even by single cruisers from strong squadrons carrying the ambassadors of powerful States, and even sometimes the sovereign himself. The act of submission was not always willingly made, and many cases might be cited in which English admirals had fired on foreign flags during peace because the stranger's topsails were not lowered promptly enough. In ordinary times these splutterings of battle lead to no serious consequences. Fighting on blue water was too common for any or for no reason at all to excite much national feeling, and the salute was at least an acknowledged usage; but when there was a general inclination to fight, this question of the salute was eminently fitted to afford a pretext for war. So it

proved in 1652. From the beginning of that year English captains had been more than usually peremptory in asserting their superiority, and broadsides had been exchanged in the Channel. At last the thing was brought to a crisis by Blake and Tromp themselves.

In the early days of May, the Dutch admiral was cruising with a fleet of some forty sail between Nieuport and the mouth of the Meuse, with general orders to protect his country's commerce and watch the English fleet. Blake was lying in Dover Roads with fifteen sail, while eight others were at anchor under Bourne in the Downs. Stories of encounters in the Channel and of the difficulties of Dutch merchantmen watched by English war-ships would naturally be brought to Tromp by his cruisers. He was not the man to hear them tamely. Tromp had a bitter personal quarrel of his own with the English. He had to revenge his father's death in battle with an English pirate, and his own long slavery to his father's slayer. As a member of the Orange party, and therefore a friend of the Stuarts, he had a double reason for hating the fleet of the Commonwealth. Now, with a long career of victory to give him confidence, conscious of the devotion of the Dutch seamen, knowing that the two Governments were daily coming nearer to open war, and that he would be supported by the national pride of Holland, he must have entered the Straits with a predisposition to come to blows. Some civilities seem to have passed between him and Bourne in the Downs, which Tromp had entered under stress of weather. In this case the Dutch admiral would have no scruple in saluting an officer who was at anchor in his own waters. On

May 19 Tromp stood over towards Calais with a north-easterly wind. On his way he was met by a Captain Van Saanen of Amsterdam, who brought news of a brush between single ships off the Start, and of the difficulties of some Dutch merchantmen blockaded in the Channel. He took his decision at once. The Dutch fleet, which had been standing to the eastward close-hauled, was put before the wind, and with Tromp himself at the head in his flagship, the 'Brederode,' it bore down on Dover Roads, the scene of his own audacious attack on Orquendo.

The meeting with Van Saanen and the change of course were both clearly seen from the decks of Blake's ships, which were under weigh, standing across the Straits in a course parallel to that first held by the Dutch fleet. To the English admiral and captains there could be no mystery in what had happened. Tromp had received orders from Holland to attack them, and was bearing down for the purpose. In their accounts of what followed, each admiral accused the other of being the aggressor, and both were doubtless quite sincere in their belief. It is never easy to say whether the fire commits an aggression on the gunpowder or the gunpowder on the fire. As the fleets neared in that May afternoon, they had begun war in their hearts, and the actual fighting was a spontaneous act. Guns were fired from both flagships—Blake's flag was flying in the 'James'—as they approached, which were said to be signals by one side, and received as insults by the other. Then crash came the 'Brederodes's' broadside into the English ship.

A foolish story tells how Blake was sitting in his

cabin, like the Spanish gentleman with the impossible name in 'Westward Ho,' and 'his officers were sitting round him, with their swords upon the table, at the wine,' when Tromp's guns shattered the stern windows of the 'James'. So dull an imagination had the inventor of this tale, that he can find no other words for Blake's mouth than the feeble jest, 'Tromp is ill bred to take my house for a brothel and break my windows'. The author of this '*grobe Seemannswitz*,' which has had a most undeserved popularity, put his hero in a very unlikely place, and among very improbable surroundings. Long before the Dutch bullets came crashing into the 'James's' timbers, Blake must have been on the high poop of his flagship, watching every movement of the 'Brederode,' as she came down on his line before the north-easterly gale. His men were at quarters, with their guns cast loose and their linstocks burning. Tromp's challenge was taken up at once. The batteries of the 'James' opened fire. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the battle lasted fiercely for five hours. For some considerable time the brunt of it fell on the 'James' alone. Blake—like Collingwood on the great day which ended the struggle for the sovereignty of the seas then beginning—had outsailed his squadron. He met the head of the Dutch line alone. In a few moments he was surrounded by enemies. Tromp's supporters were running before the wind and could join him before the close-hauled ships of the English line could come to the support of their admiral. The fight was less unequal than a mere statement of the numbers engaged would seem to make it. The English ships of the day were more solidly built than the Dutch, and the gunnery of

the English sailors was already famous for its rapidity and precision. Still the 'James' suffered heavily; her master was killed, and some fifty of her men fell dead or disabled. Before dark her mainmast had gone over her side, and she had been struck in hull or rigging by numbers of bullets. Meanwhile, the rest of the squadron had come into the line of battle, and at some time before nine o'clock relief reached the overmatched English squadron. The thunder of the guns was heard even if the fight was not seen by Bourne in the Downs, and he weighed at once. While Tromp and Blake were laying yardarm to yardarm he fell on the rear of the Dutch line, cutting off two of their ships, and created a diversion. Soon afterwards the Dutch gave up the attempt to force the Straits, hauled to the wind and stood over to the Flemish coast in the dark, leaving the two prizes in the hands of the English seamen. During the following day the fleets were in sight of one another, but the action was not renewed. The English made their way into Dover, towing their dismasted flagship, and Tromp returned to the Texel. Before going he recovered one of the two lost ships, which had been deserted by her captor Lawson, as too much battered to be worth carrying into port.

The admirals hastened to justify what they had done to their respective Governments. It was no small thing. The fight off Dover was the beginning of the most obstinate struggle in the whole history of naval warfare. When the news of what was believed to be Tromp's unprovoked attack reached London, there was an immediate and noisy demonstration in favour of war with Holland. The mob was so violent that the Council

thought it necessary to send a guard to protect the house occupied by the Dutch ambassadors. The States, though they would greatly have preferred to avoid a rupture, were not prepared to submit to the exorbitant demands of the Rump, and after another effort at negotiations, entered with spirit into the war, which, whatever the earlier provocations given to England may have been, was in this case forced upon them.

No two adversaries ever met in the history of naval war more fairly matched than the fleets of England and Holland. The whale and herring fisheries, the carrying trade, their great commerce with the East and with the Levant, had given the Dutch an undoubted superiority in material resources over any possible rival. Their shipping was calculated to be equal to that of all the other states of Europe put together. Their seafaring population, very large in itself, was reinforced by sailors of the hardy nations of the North, who found good work and wages in the ports of Holland and Zeeland. During the long war with Spain, their fleets had been in constant employment. Their admirals were the only sea commanders who can be said to rank with the English admirals, and some of them, notably Tromp and De Ruyter, were fully the equals of any of our own heroes. In mere number of ships, not by any means the most important factor of naval strength, the States had immense resources. During this war, which barely lasted twenty months, no less than sixty fighting vessels, many of them very large, were launched in the Dutch yards—a number at least sufficient to replace their total loss by shipwreck or capture. On the other hand, the Netherlands suffered from several weaknesses. They

were so dependent upon trade that as soon as it became impossible to continue the fisheries, and difficult to bring home the convoys from the East or the Levant, surrender on any tolerable terms became a necessity. Dutchmen could put their country under water to escape foreign conquest, but were not prepared to be ruined for a point of honour. After all, the lady who did not fear death, but who could not stand pinching, was not a wholly absurd person. The strength of their navy, too, lay rather in its quantity than its quality. Hitherto they had only had to fight the clumsy and ill-managed Spanish galleons. The States had consequently been tempted to build their vessels slightly, and of inferior timber. In order that they might navigate the shallows of the Dutch coast, they were constructed with very flat bottoms. They were therefore ill-fitted to cope with severe gunnery, and were not nearly so weatherly as the English ships. Obstinate courage and good seamanship might have triumphed over these defects, but there was a terrible source of weakness in the very heart of the Dutch fleet. The officers were divided by political quarrels. Each of the Dutch factions —the Orange and the Republican—had its supporters among the naval officers. In the desperate battles of the next twenty months, it happened too often for the honour of Holland, but, as we may confess without shame, happily for the fortune of England, that an admiral of one party was badly supported, or shamefully deserted, by officers of the other.

The naval power of the Commonwealth and of the Protectorate, which came into being in the middle of the war, was smaller than the Dutch, but it was

thoroughly sound. Charles had left some sixty ships, mostly built by the Petts, and the Admiralty Committee had been launching others in batches of eight or ten, for the last three years. England was not liable to find its trade spoilt because one route was blocked. It was moreover still mainly an agricultural country, and therefore better able to bear interruption to its commerce. The political divisions of Englishmen, bitter as they were, did not extend to the fleet. Cases of misconduct did occur, but they were attributable to individual failings, to cowardice or stupidity, and with these the Government dealt in a very summary way. It must not be forgotten that the line of battle was always partly composed of merchant ships hired or pressed for the war. In not a few cases they were left in command of their skippers, who might have neither the will nor the ability to fight them properly. These men were often part or whole owners of the ships, and they shrank from thrusting all the property they had in the world under Tromp's guns. It was soon found that vessels handled in this fashion were a mere hindrance in the line, and the Commonwealth, largely on Blake's recommendation, made it a rule to employ their own officers only. If there were any among them who needed a stimulus in the discharge of their duty, it was supplied by the knowledge that they had to choose between the risk of being shot by the Dutch, and certainty of being shot for cowardice at home if they flinched. With these forces, in which experience, numbers, and quality were so fairly balanced, the greatest naval power of the day and the greatest naval power of the future came out in the summer of 1652 to

measure their forces in the wide lists of the North Sea.

The length of time which passed before the main fleets of the two countries were ready for action is a clear proof that the war had come upon their Governments as a surprise. Of the two, the English was the better prepared. Over and above the ships fitting in the Thames, they had the fleet of Sir George Ascue who had just returned from the West Indies, whither he had gone to take possession of the colonies in the name of the Parliament. He joined Blake in the Downs, and the two at once devoted themselves to the pleasant and lucrative work of snapping up Dutch convoys. All the advantages were on the side of England in this game. The Dutch were coming home in ignorance of the fact that war had broken out, and were, as a matter of course, taking the ordinary route along the Channel, which led them right past the English coast into the hands of the fleet in the Downs—even if they had the luck to get so far. In the course of June, therefore, the Londoners had frequently the pleasure of hearing that this or the other handful of Dutch merchant ships, all more or less richly laden, had been captured by Admiral Blake or Admiral Ascue, and sent into the Thames. That magic word prize-money was ringing in the ears of all Wapping and sailors came cheerfully in to man the ships.

In the last days of June Blake sailed north with 'a gallant fleet,' to sweep the Dutch fishermen off the coasts of England and Scotland. This was useful and necessary work, for the poaching of the Hollanders had been one of the grievances which brought on the war,

but it could not be glorious. With a fleet of at least forty sail under his command, the English admiral could have no difficulty in overpowering the fifteen frigates of the Dutch convoy. He did what he had to do thoroughly. The coast was swept to the extreme north of Scotland, the enemy's guard-ships were taken or sunk, the cargoes of poached herrings were thrown into the sea, and the busses were sent empty home. While the bulk of the English fleet was engaged in this fashion, the Council of State was learning a lesson as to the folly of dividing its forces in the presence of the enemy. Barely had Blake passed Dunbar when Tromp swept out of the Texel and appeared in the Straits with upwards of a hundred sail. There was no force to meet him except Sir George Ascue's squadron of fourteen ships in the Downs, and the vessels fitting for sea in the Thames. These last were not ready to sail, and even if they had been, could not have left the river without manifest danger of being overpowered in the midst of the Dutch fleet. Ascue took the only course open to him. He ran under the guns of Dover Castle, and anchored his ships as close as possible to the shore. For a time there seemed danger of an actual invasion, or at least of some attack on Ascue by Tromp, who knew those waters well. Though the Council of State had made a mistake, it did not lose its head. There was no panic. Letters were sent to Blake telling him of the state of things, and leaving it to him to return or stay where he was, as he thought best. Frigates were stationed off the Lizard to warn home-coming merchant ships to put into the western ports till the danger was past. Cromwell went down

to Dover to superintend the erection of batteries; the inland garrisons were hurried down to the coast, and the militia called out. These measures would probably have been enough to make any attack of Tromp's a failure, but none was ever made. The fortune of England, which has saved her from the consequences of so much blundering, was true on this occasion also. Tromp's fleet was kept idle by calms for days, and when the wind did come it was from the south-west. Finding there was nothing to be done at Dover, the Dutch admiral sailed north, partly with the object of meeting Blake, but also to find and protect a squadron of richly laden East Indiamen which were returning to Holland by that route.

If the fleets had met there would have been an earlier version of the battle off the Ness, but Tromp had lost his luck. He met the Indiamen between the Orkneys and Norway, but before he could find the English ships a series of terrible gales scattered his fleet, and he was driven back to the Texel with about half his force. The other half was either lost or driven into the ports of Norway. For a time it was believed in England that all these ships had gone to the bottom, but as a matter of fact the greater part of them got back to Holland before long. They did not come home to be under the command of Tromp. The year had been disastrous to Holland. Thousands of families had suffered loss or even ruin by the scattering of the herring fleet. With its usual injustice the mob laid the blame for this misfortune, and others of the same kind which had happened to the convoys, on Tromp. They thought he might have prevented at least the capture of

the busses by sailing at once to the north instead of wasting time (as they would call it) in threatening Ascue. In high dudgeon at the ingratitude of his countrymen, and perhaps with a self-reproachful sense of the spice of truth there was in the charge, Tromp resigned his commission. The States, who were, with all the meanness of party politicians, not sorry to part with an officer of known Orange opinions, accepted his resignation. De Witt and De Ruyter, *la monnaie de M. Turenne*, were appointed his successors.

Before they had an opportunity of showing whether they could fill his place, there was a little bit of fighting done in the Channel altogether outside of the great war. Scores were not yet settled with the French, and just at that moment the Parliament saw a chance of teaching them an effective lesson. Dunkirk was besieged by the Spaniards, and Cardinal Mazarin was sending a squadron to relieve it under the Duke of Vendôme. He never reached that port. Blake was back from the north by this time with prizes taken from the scattered fleet of Tromp. In Calais Roads he fell upon the eight ships of Vendôme's squadron, and made exceedingly short work of them. A more remarkable instance of the high-handed proceedings of the Rump's Council of State was never given. England was neither in alliance with Spain nor at war with France, but it acted as if it were. The French had chosen to permit insults to English trade, and they were made to suffer. For the rest, the lawless state of the sea in those times made these acts of reprisal less surprising than they would have appeared even fifty years later. In the following century Blake's biographer obviously felt that this affair in Calais Roads

had a look of piracy, and he casts about for excuses. Some he felt there must have been, though it is 'nowhere mentioned what inquiry Admiral Blake made into this matter'. It would have been surprising if it were. In 1652 the thing needed no excuse. The French had made no inquiry when they plundered the ships of the Smyrna Company, nor did Blake when he fell on Vendôme. He had his orders, and acted on them.

With the exception of this episode Blake was engaged during August and September in cruising off the coast of Holland and watching the Straits of Dover. In the former month Sir George Ascue had a sharp fight with De Ruyter, who was bringing home a convoy, in the Channel. The action was indecisive, and the Dutch admiral seems to have carried by far the greater part, if not all, of his merchant ships safe into port, to have joined De Witt, and stood to sea at once in search of the English fleet. Naval warfare, as Nelson was fond of insisting whenever he had missed anybody, is very uncertain, and it was perhaps not due to any want of vigilance that De Ruyter was able to pass Dover and reach port unmolested. So little can be learnt about Blake's movements for these weeks, too, that we cannot even say whether he was in a position to watch the Dutch. On August 18 even the Council of State knew his whereabouts so badly as to be under the necessity of sending messengers in search of him to places so widely apart as Southwold, Yarmouth, and Dover. Whether by ill-luck, ill-management, or that want of frigates which so often drove Nelson to the verge of madness, Blake missed De Ruyter. In the early part

of September the Dutch admiral and his colleague appeared off the Goodwin Sands, and challenged the fleet in the Downs to battle. They had done their best for the trade of their country for the year, and were now about to try and provide for the next by driving the English fleet into port.

The battle which followed has one feature which distinguishes it from most others of this war. It is more intelligible than the majority of them. Sea fights are never easy to be understood by landsmen, nor even by naval officers, if we are to judge by the extraordinary discrepancies in the accounts they give of them. If any reader cares to test this statement let him read James's account of the battle of June 1 (a very good specimen), or any narrative of Rodney's great victory over De Grasse, and see what idea they leave on his mind. Still, in the case of these later victories—sea fight and victory meant about the same thing with us for long—details are to be got. We know the number of ships engaged, their order in the line, the admirals' signals, the direction of the wind, and so forth. By attending to these, and keeping the points of the compass in mind, any one with the knowledge of sea terms possessed by six Englishmen out of ten can, by a little patient worrying, get at some comprehension of what happened. In the descriptions of the naval battles of the seventeenth century this indispensable information is hardly ever given. The admirals confine themselves to reporting that they have met the enemy, and, by the powerful working of God, have adequately thrashed him. Nothing is less certain than the mere number of ships engaged, their order of sailing is never given, and the general

movements of the fleet are only indicated in the vaguest manner.

There is of course one way in which the difficulty can be got over. The biographer or historian may use the 'recipe for making an epic poem' and fill his battle picture up with the thunder of cannon, flames, heroic valour, spars and corpses floating on the water, and all the other appropriate ornaments. He may describe his hero as 'riding up' to the enemy, and tell how he watched the whole battle with an eagle eye, in ignorance of the notorious fact that when two fleets are well engaged, no admiral could see more than the ships immediately around him. Perhaps, however, we have had quite enough of this sort of thing. It is better on the whole to say as precisely as you can what was done, and when you do not know, to say that also.

One or two things may be asserted about these battles with tolerable certainty. They were not confused scrambles of ships fighting in no order at all. This verdict on them rested mainly on the word of a Scotch schoolmaster of the last century who thought he had discovered the advantages of 'cutting the line'. Mr. Clerk was mistaken. Not perhaps as early as Elizabeth's time, but assuredly long before the outbreak of the war of 1651, the Dutch and English seamen were perfectly well aware of the advantages of fighting in order and in line ahead—that is, with the ships one after the other, instead of side by side, the old order of the galleys which had been adhered to by the chiefs of the Spanish Armada. It is no doubt true that this order was not very accurately kept, and was even sometimes neglected. Want of practice in handling fleets,

and the great number of the ships, account satisfactorily enough for some of these mistakes, but where the proper order was wholly neglected it was because the land officers in command of the fleets were obstinate and foolish enough to fly in the face of the unanimous opinion of the seamen. Monk, after he had become Duke of Albemarle, once ran a round dozen ships on the Galloper Sands by persisting in trying to carry a large fleet up the Thames in line abreast. Under the Commonwealth no officer was sure enough of his position to indulge himself in freaks of this kind. Blake has never been proved to have been guilty of undervaluing the opinion of his professional officers, and it is safe to conclude that he did in every case what we have good evidence for believing they would have advised him to do. When he fought this first pitched battle of the war he had with him Penn as vice-admiral, and though that officer was rather a poor creature in many ways, he was a good seaman.

The battle of September 28 can be, so to speak, reconstructed by whoever will remember that the fleets did fight in order, and will read the account of their movements published by Whitelocke with a chart. Its incidents were almost as much dictated by the form of the land as those of any land battle. The scene of this and many later engagements with the Dutch was in that section of the south-east coast of England which stretches from the South Foreland to the mouth of the Stour, the boundary of Suffolk and Essex. All along this line the land is fringed by sands. The Goodwins lie over against the coast of Kent, from Pegwell Bay to the South Foreland. Inside of them is the road known

as the Downs. As you sail to the north and north-east from this anchorage, you leave a score of dangerous shallows on your left. Outside, and following the north-easterly bend of the Essex coast, are the Girdler and the Long Sand. Inside of them are the Maplins, Burrow, Buxey, the Gunfleet, and others. This last stretches from the mouth of the Colne, along the coast of Essex. Outside of the Long Sand is the Kentish Knock. Even in the midst of peace, and when these sands are studded with light-ships, it is dangerous to navigate the waters which lie over and about them. In war time, and without warning lights, it was perilous in the last extreme.

The danger was, however, less for one combatant than for the other. The flat construction of the Dutch ships made it easier for them to manœuvre among shallows than it was for the sharper keeled English ships. It was therefore probably with a distinct intention of profiting by this advantage—for the sake of which they sacrificed so much else—that the Dutch always tried to fight as near the English coast as they could, and in more than one battle, success justified the calculation.

In pursuance of their ordinary policy, the Dutch had been cruising between Yarmouth and the east end of Kent from at least September 14. On the 25th they were seen at the back of the Goodwins, that is to say between those sands and the coast of France. For this and the two succeeding days the weather was so bad that the English fleet in the Downs could not put to sea. It was calmer on the 28th, and Blake sailed to the northward, with the wind at north of west. He

could calculate with certainty on finding the Dutch in that direction, since it was their object to watch the mouth of the Thames, and they would in any case be careful not to entangle themselves in the Straits or cut themselves off from their retreat home by getting into the Channel. His fleet consisted of between fifty and sixty sail. The 'Resolution' of sixty guns carried his flag, since the 'James' had been dismasted in the fight of May 19. Among the ships under his command was the 'Sovereign,' then esteemed the finest war vessel afloat, and famous enough to deserve particular mention. She had been built by Phineas Pett, the founder of that family, and called the 'Sovereign of the Seas'. According to the custom of the time she was covered with carving and gilding, some idea of which may be formed by looking at the model still preserved at Greenwich. In spite of this magnificence, the 'Sovereign,' like many other dandies, was a valiant fighter, and the Dutch—at least, so said the English sailors—called her the 'Yellow Devil'. She outlived the Commonwealth, was re-christened 'Royal,' carried Sir Ralph Delaval's flag at the great battle of La Hogue, and 'at length leaky and defective herself with age, she was laid up at Chatham in order to be rebuilt,' and was there burnt on November 27, 1696, after sixty years' good service.

At about three in the afternoon of this eventful September 28, Blake sighted the Dutch fleet. They were in line, lying close along the outer side of the Kentish Knock, heading as it would seem to the south. This position had obviously been assumed with the intention of putting the English fleet in a dilemma. With the wind from north of west, the Dutch were in

no danger of going on the Sand, and would naturally calculate that their enemy must either attack them to leeward, in which case he would be open to the danger of having fire-ships floated down on him, or if he did try to get to windward, would run a serious risk of grounding on the Knock. When the Dutch were sighted, there was a gap in the English line. The 'Resolution,' with Penn's flagship the 'Sovereign,' the 'Andrew,' and a few others, had outsailed the rest of the fleet. One of the captains of this vanguard hailed or signalled for leave to engage, but was ordered by Blake to wait till the rest of the fleet had come up. For an hour the enemies remained in sight of one another, without firing a shot, the English ships lying-to or beating to windward, and the Dutch keeping quiet to lee of the bank. Their inaction seemed so surprising at the time, for they could easily have cut the English admiral off from his supports, that it was attributed to dissensions between the Dutch admirals. I am inclined to think they were acting on the plan mentioned above. During this pause De Witt was seen to shift his flag from his first ship, a vessel of forty guns, to an Indiaman of fifty-six.

About four o'clock the English line was complete, and Blake bore down on the enemy. He doubtless hoisted the signal to engage, but it is not said what it was, and there was then no general code. His course was directed to windward of the Dutch line, and therefore between it and the Kentish Knock. A few single guns had already been fired by the Dutch, in bravado according to Whitelocke's correspondent, but probably to find the range. The 'Resolution' passed along the Dutch

line, which edged to the southwards to avoid her, and the following ships all poured in their broadsides as they went. Then the mishap hoped for by the Dutch happened. The flagships of Blake and Penn, the 'Sovereign,' the 'Andrew,' and as it seems one or two others, got aground on the Knock. This accident may appear by no means creditable to the seamanship of anybody concerned, but it is possible that the risk was run deliberately with the object of keeping the weather-gage. The English seamen knew that as they had the Sand to windward and not to leeward of them, they could get off even if they did touch, and in any case the grounding of the leading ships would act as a warning to the rest of the line. So it turned out; the vessels which had grounded soon freed themselves, and those behind, seeing what had befallen their admirals, put their helms up and ran right down on the Dutch, who were now standing to the south. 'We fell back to receive them,' says Whitelocke's friend, 'and so staid by them till night parted us.'

This irritatingly vague phrase contains all that is known of the rest of the battle. It was fierce, and for the Dutch disastrous. The orders to the English fleet were to waste no powder at long bowls, but to come to close quarters, and they were well obeyed. Even the merchantship men-of-war were fought with the utmost spirit. Following a practice which continued to be universal among continental seamen till Trafalgar, the Dutch fired to dismast. The English, as they have done since, fired to hull—to sink or kill. The respective efficiency of these systems was seen in the result. On our side the loss was slight—one captain and about

forty men only were killed, and though many ships had their rigging cut to pieces, none were sunk or even totally disabled. The Dutch lost several ships sent to the bottom, and had others cut down to hulks. One carrying the flag of a rear-admiral struck to Captain Mildmay. It was believed in the English fleet, and not without reason, that if the early dusk of a September evening had not parted the combatants, the Dutch would have been utterly destroyed.

All night the two fleets remained so close together that the lights of the Dutch could be seen from the English ships.

> The night comes on, we eager to pursue
> The combat still, and they ashamed to leave,
> Till the last streaks of dying day withdrew,
> And doubtful moonlight did our rage deceive.

The verse might have been written with greater truth of this than of the scrambling four days' battle in 1666. It was thought that the battle would be renewed on the following day, but when morning came the Dutch were seen to be six miles off to the north-east. The wind had shifted during the night, and the Dutch now held the weathergage. They availed themselves of it to avoid fighting. All the attempts of Blake to bring them to action were unsuccessful, and on the 30th the English saw them run into Goree. Finding himself dangerously near the shallows of the Dutch coast, the English admiral gave up the chase and returned home.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DUEL WITH TROMP.

The immediate effect of this disaster was the restoration of Tromp to the command of the Dutch fleet. His successors had manifestly not replaced him. Their actual defeat was very much worse than mere failure to succeed. If the States, too, intended to continue the war at all, they had need to exert themselves. Within a few weeks great convoys would be ready to go out, and within a few months others would be coming home. The task of providing for the safety of both fell on Tromp, and he set about it in his usual thoroughgoing way. In the course of October he had equipped ninety sail, including fire-ships, and in November he saw the fishing and northern fleets safe out of the German Ocean, and came south to keep the Channel clear for the home-coming India and Levant traders.

The Council of State presented him with a very favourable opportunity for paying off his scores with Blake. They also had their convoys to look after, and had weakened the fleet in the Downs for the service. London had to be supplied with coal for the winter, and Penn was told off to protect the Tyne colliers. Meanwhile a quarrel had arisen with Denmark, and a

squadron had been detached to bring that country to reason, and see to the due arrival of our supplies of masts and pitch from Scandinavia. Many of Blake's vessels were also in need of repair, and had been docked at Chatham under the impression that there would be no more sea-fighting so late in the year. When Tromp appeared off the Goodwins with his ninety sail on November 29 Blake had only forty-two ships with him, and only twenty of these had their full complement of men on board. The odds were heavy, but Blake had confidence enough in himself and his fleet to give battle in spite of them. His fleet was one in which an admiral might well trust. Before weighing to attack an enemy twice as strong, in mere numbers at least, as himself, Blake called a council of officers. That a council of war never fights is a rule to which the whole history of the Parliamentary armies and navies is one long exception. Their councils of war always did fight. The officers who met in the cabin of the 'Triumph' on November 29 came to their usual decision, and the forty-two English ships weighed and stood to sea to attack Tromp. It is possible that their crews were reinforced by volunteers at the last moment. The Deal and Dover fishermen had swarmed off in their boats to help Blake during the fight on May 19 when the odds were three to one against him, and they would not hang back when they were only two to one.

The fleets met about noon, November 30, off Dungeness and fought till dark, which at that season would be soon after five o'clock. In the course of an afternoon of furious struggle the English suffered a defeat, but a defeat

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which came as near as was possible to being as good as a victory. To have fought Tromp one against two for five hours, and not to have been utterly destroyed, was honour enough. If it had been possible to beat him at such odds the Dutch would not have been, what they undoubtedly were, the bravest and most skilful enemies we ever met at sea. The movements of the two fleets can, as is commonly the case, only be guessed at.

There were many valiant things done in this battle. Blake's flag was flying in the 'Triumph'. The 'Resolution' must have been terribly mauled in the battle of September 28, and have returned to port to make good the damage done by the Kentish Knock and the Dutch cannon. Supported by the 'Victory' and the 'Vanguard,' he was engaged for some time with a score of the enemy's ships, and ran no small danger of being overpowered. At last the three ships were relieved by others, and shook themselves clear. As Blake got away from his immediate assailants, he saw a desperate struggle going on in another part of the line. Two English captains, Akson and Batten, commanding the 'Garland' and the 'Bonaventure,' had resolved to haul down Tromp's flag, and manœuvred to lay their ships, neither of them vessels of any great size, alongside him. To their glory and misfortune they succeeded. They grappled the 'Brederode,' and furiously attempted to board. Tromp defended the deck of his flagship as he always had done. His secretary was shot dead by his side. In a few moments other vessels came to his assistance, and the crews of the 'Garland' and 'Bonaventure' had to defend themselves. Attacked by the newcomers, among whom was Evertzen, the vice-admiral of

Zeeland, and still fastened by their grappling irons to the 'Brederode,' they had to beat off swarms of boarders. This fight must have been perfectly visible to many of the ships on both sides. None of the vessels locked together can have been firing. The Dutch would be afraid of damaging one another, and the English were too busy with their pikes and cutlasses. An attempt was made to relieve the two ships by Blake and the captains near him, but the Dutch crowded up to cover their admiral, and while the English flagship was fighting with them, the 'Garland' and the 'Bonaventure' were at last overpowered by Tromp. Akson and Batten fought till their crews were cut to pieces. The 'Garland's' upper deck was blown up by her captain, and scores of Dutchmen sent into the air with it. This desperate resource only averted the end for a short time. Tromp urged on his boarders, and at last the two vessels were captured. When darkness came Blake drew off his fleet and retreated into the Thames, having lost, besides the 'Garland' and the 'Bonaventure,' three ships sunk.

So ended the battle off the Ness, victoriously for Tromp, but not disastrously for Blake. The Dutchman hoisted his famous and perhaps legendary broom at the mainmast head of his flagship, and sailed in triumph along the south coast of England to sweep the Channel. In spite of this piece of almost comic bravado, Tromp can hardly have been very proud of his victory. At the bottom of his heart he must have felt that if he could do no more with such a superiority in numbers as he had on November 30, he had very little reason to look forward with confidence

to an encounter with equal numbers. It was thus that Englishmen reasoned. The reports of the battle were read with pride. The Council of State thanked Blake for his services, and began to equip a fleet strong enough to contend for the command of the Channel. According to the general practice of the Long Parliament, this great force was to be put under command of a committee. Deane, who had been working at Whitehall or fighting in Scotland, was sent back to his command at sea. He joined Blake on board the 'Triumph'. Monk was now for the first time sent to serve as an admiral. In addition to providing for the command, the Council of State looked to the manning of the fleet. There had been some falling off in the eagerness with which men had volunteered at the beginning of the war. The pressgang was a great resource, but though efficient, it was difficult to work, and if used with severity was likely to do infinite mischief to the by no means robust popularity of the Commonwealth among the sailors. Men, when they knew they were hunted, instinctively did their best to escape. There were fights in some places. Occasionally the pressgang only secured a haul of useless landsmen, who had to be let go. The local authorities in the seaports were often themselves shipowners, and it was hard to make them deprive themselves of sailors in order to man the fleet of the State. Colonel Overton, governor of Hull, found it necessary to threaten to send the Mayor and constables of the town to serve against the Dutch themselves, if they did not show more zeal to forward the press. Without neglecting this approved method of making up crews, the Council of State wisely decided to see

what could be done by making the service more popular. It improved the regulations for the distribution of prize-money, gave volunteers advances on their pay, and enabled them to set aside a part for the use of their families during their absence. By force, or by persuasion, the great fleet was manned, and by the beginning of February Blake, Deane, and Monk, helped by Penn, Lawson, and many other seamen, were off Portland with seventy sail.

They had no need to go in search of Tromp, who must needs bring his merchant ships right past them. On Friday, February 18, he was seen coming up the Channel with a huge convoy of at least 150 sail under his wing. His war-ships were between them and the English, and were well together. The wind was in favour of the Dutch. When Blake caught sight of his enemy, his own line was not yet formed. His squadron, the Red, was with him, but the White was far off to the eastward, and the Blue was at some distance to the west. As in the case of the fight off Dungeness, Blake engaged superior numbers with something even like rashness. Tromp, who had his fleet in hand and the wind in his favour, would naturally take the initiative, and seize upon an opportunity to crush his enemy in detail, but no attempt was made to avoid him by the English admirals. Deane was on board the 'Triumph' with Blake, and the two, supported by barely a dozen ships, engaged the whole force of the Dutch. On this occasion the adventure was justified by the results, but the isolated ships suffered very severely. The fight began at 8 o'clock in the morning, and several hours passed before they received any support. Nothing gives a higher

opinion of the obstinate courage of the seamen of the Commonwealth, than that this handful of vessels should have borne the brunt of a struggle with Tromp's superior numbers for so long without being completely crushed. They were shattered in hull and rigging, some of them so severely that they had to crawl into Portsmouth that night as best they could, and the loss of life was great. On board the 'Triumph' a hundred men fell. Her captain, Ball, and Mr. Sparrow, the admiral's secretary, were killed on her deck. In the heat of the fight Blake was wounded in the thigh by a splinter, which also tore a piece out of the breeches of his colleague, Deane. He was spared to die by the side of Monk four months later in the great battle in June. But though the 'Triumph's' masts were down, or going over her side, though her crew was thinned and hull shattered, her flag was still flying when Penn, Lawson, and Monk did at last struggle up against the wind into the line of battle. The last hours of daylight were spent in a general engagement, and when darkness came on the fleets separated, Tromp to look after his convoy, and the English to watch him.

Blake and his flagship were both in very ill case, but the 'Triumph' remained with the fleet, though too badly crippled to take part in the rest of this 'very stupendous' action. The superlative is Clarendon's. During the night the two fleets continued working slowly along the Channel towards the Straits of Dover, and on Saturday morning the struggle began again, to last all day, and to be renewed on Sunday. On the second day the English fleet had the wind, and pressed in to pierce the Dutch line and reach the eagerly

desired merchant ships. These last made all the haste they could along the French coast, huddled together and looking anxiously back at the fight going on behind them. Tromp did his duty splendidly, and was manfully supported by De Ruyter and Evertzen, but before night fell the advantage had begun to lean to the English side. One Dutch ship of more than 1300 tons, carrying the flag of a rear-admiral, struck to Captain John Lawson, of the 'Fairfax'. This valiant Yorkshireman, who had fought his way up from before the mast of a collier, and who 'was indeed of all the men of that time, and of that extraction and education, incomparably the modestest and the wisest man, and most worthy man to be confided in,' was the hero of the day in the English fleet, but he was thoroughly backed up. So clearly was the fight going against the Dutch, that the ships of the convoy began to throw cargo overboard to lighten themselves for flight.

Still, as Penn, remembering these three days afterwards, told the Duke of York, a Dutchman is never so dangerous as when he is desperate. When Sunday came, Tromp was seen making for the shallows of the French coast at Calais, with his fleet in a half-moon, and the convoy in its arms. The third battle was as savage as the first and second, but more decisive. Before night several Dutch men-of-war had been sunk or taken. Some of the captains are said to have failed their indomitable admiral in his great need. At last Penn, with a squadron of frigates, burst through the broken line and captured some fifty merchant ships. The English sailors passed Sunday night preparing for great captures on the morrow. They were disappointed.

Tromp saw that he must use the hours of darkness if he wished to save his charge. At sundown he anchored in the shallows near Calais, and then sent orders to his captains to take advantage of the turn of the tide, and make the best of their way home. He was obeyed by men who knew every inch of the coast, the exact force of every current, and the value of every puff of wind. On Monday morning the winds and the tide had carried the Dutch beyond reach, and Tromp led the bulk of his convoy and his battered fleet into the Texel after all.

Very shortly, if not immediately after the three days' battle, Blake was compelled by his wound to give up active service for the present. He had caught cold in his wound on going ashore, and fell seriously ill at Portsmouth. Here he lay until June, attended by Dr. Daniel Whistler, who had been sent down from London to look after the sick and wounded seamen. In itself the wound was not serious. The danger came from the cold and its attendant fever. Still, the admiral's life does not seem ever to have been in danger. Dr. Daniel Whistler found him mending in March, and was only doubtful of the issue on account of his age. 'De senibus non est temere sperandum' was the maxim he quoted to Sir Harry Vane, which is one of the innumerable proofs of how greatly the standard of old age has risen during the last two centuries. Blake was only fifty-four when the doctor wrote of him as a man of such advanced age that any accident might be expected to be fatal.

Blake's reputation for humanity to his men permits the supposition that his own convalescence was darkened by knowing that he was surrounded by hundreds of

sick and wounded seamen who were miserably dying from want of the most necessary help, or slowly recovering in spite of the most adverse circumstances. The Government was little if at all to blame for the sufferings of the seamen. Humanity apart—and the Commonwealth men were far from wanting in kindly sympathy for their humbler servants—there was every motive of interest to make them anxious to help the sailors. What the Government could do it did. Doctors were sent from London to organise impromptu hospitals. Food, medicine, and clothes were supplied as abundantly as was possible. Still, with all its zeal the Admiralty Committee was able to do miserably little. There was, in fact, no organisation in existence to meet such a crisis. Doctors might be sent, and food, and medicine, but the medical men had no staff of nurses to obey their orders, no proper hospital to put their patients into, no one to help them in collecting and distributing the supplies needed. In the letter which reports the recovery of Blake, Dr. Whistler draws a shocking picture of the state of the wounded. One after another he enumerates the things which might be avoided if only 'some capacious place, with good air, water, and convenience of landing, were procured'. If such a thing existed it would not be necessary to leave the men long exposed before they could be received anywhere; they would not lie long in private houses before the surgeons saw them, in want of medicine and linen. It would be possible to feed them. From all which it would appear that the sick and wounded often lay for days starving in garrets at the mercy of harpies who looked upon them as a mere means of making money. 'The want of

linen and medicines, the difficulties of diet and nursing, the thronging of weak men into poor stifling houses, and the temptations to drink in victualling houses that have no other but strong drink, here where the water is brackish,' could all be avoided if only there was a hospital. But there was none, and the utmost exertions of the Admiralty Commissioners could at best only make a very wretched state of things a little less bad than it might have been. Something was done to provide for the future. The Commissioners began to talk at least of securing Porchester Castle as a hospital, and a beginning was made in the formation of a thoroughly efficient medical service.

While Blake was still too weak to resume his command, an event occurred to which the speculations of biographers have given a quite fictitious importance in his life. On April 19, 1653, Cromwell turned the Rump into the streets, and put the key of the House of Commons into his pocket. It is of course always interesting to know of any man of that generation whether he was friend or enemy to Oliver Cromwell. The question suggests itself in regard to Blake as well as others. If it is to be answered by the help of known facts only, there could be no doubt as to the admiral's opinions. He would seem, by his whole conduct during the last four years of his life, to have thought that the Protector was the man most capable of governing, and the fittest to be obeyed. From the first he served the Protectorate loyally. Blake never fell into opposition, with Lambert, Ludlow, or Sir Harry Vane; he never intrigued with the Royalists like Penn or Venables; he was never found acting with unruly fanatics like

Lawson. Whether in civil employment on shore, or in command at sea, he was always the trustworthy servant of the new ruler. There is no jot or tittle of direct evidence that he ever doubted the right of Cromwell to govern.

With his recorded actions on one side, and no proof of his private feelings on the other, it would seem to be the simplest thing to believe that he agreed with Milton in accepting Cromwell's government, not as a mere necessity, but with loyalty. It has, however, been a commonplace that he was not the Protector's friend. One biographer after another has undertaken to tell what he really felt at the bottom of his heart; and however much they may differ in their explanations, there is one point on which they all agree. It is that Blake's convictions and his conduct were in flagrant contradiction with one other. He has been supposed to have disapproved of the execution of the King, or to have regretted the fall of the monarchy, or to have secretly bewailed the ruin of the 'liberty' which notoriously flourished under the Rump. While he was protesting against these things 'in foro interno,' according to the theories, he was manifestly helping to do every one of them, or to maintain them when done. He not only made no open protest against the execution of Charles, but he took his place in the navy commission within a few days after the King's head was off, which he could certainly not have done at such a crisis if the Commonwealth had had the slightest reason for doubting his loyalty to its cause. If he did not consciously fight to upset the monarchy, he served the Governments which were established on its ruins. For the rest,

when the Civil War began there was no man in England who dreamt he was about to do more than try to confine the King within the limits of his prerogative. If Blake held the cause of liberty dear, he certainly moved neither hand nor foot to show that he believed it to be bound up with the continued rule of the ragged remnant of the Long Parliament.

Biographers have made ingenious attempts to reconcile the apparent discrepancies in Blake's conduct. Like the killer of giants, they made their difficulties first, and then removed them. The method is simple. He is supposed to have felt that he was bound to serve his country, however little he approved of its Government. In modern times this would be a sufficient explanation of the conduct of a French Legitimist who should hold a commission from the Republic. It would have looked to an Englishman of the seventeenth century very like a jesuitical excuse for being a coward and a traitor. Neither the Royalist nor the Parliamentarian would have dreamt of distinguishing between his cause and the cause of England; they were one and the same thing. When revolutions had begun to make men supple, officers were found to serve the ruling powers, while they were secretly sending offers of devotion to the King *de jure;* but they hid their conduct, and when it was discovered the world had a rough name for it. Nothing of the sort can be proved against Blake. Until it is, he is entitled to be considered an honest man, which in the school he was trained in meant that he fought for no cause in which he did not believe. If he had disapproved of the execution of the King, he would have refused to serve his slayers. If,

like Fairfax, he had been shocked by the execution, and frightened at its possible consequences, he also would have taken the first opportunity to retire to his estate. If he had been a republican of the Vane stamp, he would have declined to obey Cromwell. Even if he could not honourably retire during the Dutch war, nothing compelled him to command the Protector's fleet in the Mediterranean, or to direct that gigantic buccaneering enterprise, the attack on Spain.

On the supposition that he was an honest man Blake's conduct is perfectly consistent, and needs no explanation. He fought for the Parliament as a Puritan, he approved of the King's execution, because like many others he saw that Charles could not be trusted to accept the consequences of defeat, and because he, too, considered his sovereign guilty of treason to his office, and therefore deserving of death. He accepted the Protectorate because he believed that Oliver Cromwell could be better trusted with the Puritan cause, which was also in his eyes the cause of England, than the worn-out remnant of the Long Parliament which was trying by providing for the re-election of certain members, and so forth, to effect a usurpation every whit as contrary to the spirit of the English constitution as anything done by the army. Merely as a fighting man, his sympathies would be with the great soldier as against a handful of lawyers and pedants. There is no evidence on the point, but it is far from unlikely that Blake knew more or less what was to happen in April. He was not one of the men who were by Cromwell's side throughout the war, but their acquaintance was of long standing. They had met in the West during the campaign after Naseby.

The offer of a major-general's command in Ireland showed that the future Protector knew and trusted him. At Whitehall and in the Downs they had worked together. Blake cannot have been ignorant of Cromwell's decision to force on some settlement of the nation, nor can he have been blind to what was patent enough to the rest of the world—the extreme likelihood of some action by the army against the Rump. As he neither tried to oppose it nor showed any displeasure when it was done, he must be supposed to have accepted it as inevitable.

The adhesion of the fleet to Cromwell was expressed by Monk and Deane, who were with the ships at Spithead. One of the stock stories about Blake is that at this crisis he told the seamen they had nothing to do with the form of government, but were there to keep foreigners from fooling us. Something of the sort he may probably have said to cut short dangerous talk, but it can hardly have been at a time when he seems to have been confined to his bed. He was able to take only a very small share in the rest of the Dutch War. Towards the end of May he returned to active service, and took command of the ships fitting out in the Thames, but the fleet at sea was led by Monk and Deane. On June 2 these admirals brought Tromp to action off the Gable, and defeated him. In the heat of the battle Deane fell, cut in two by a cannon shot, and Monk, with all his usual stolid courage, threw his mantle over the mutilated body of his colleague, and continued coolly to direct the fight. Blake had hurried out his squadron of eighteen sail on hearing that an engagement was pending, but he did not join until the morning of June 3, in time to share in the pursuit of Tromp

along the coast of Flanders. The battle was not his battle, and it was the last in which he took even a subordinate part in this war. His illness had been only half cured when he came back to duty, and returned upon him amid the fatigues of cruising with such violence that he was compelled to resign his command. He landed at Walderswick on July 5, and left Monk, Penn, and Lawson to end the Dutch war.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.

Blake took at least a nominal part in the administrative work of Cromwell's Government. He was one of the members of the Little or Barebones Parliament, and a commissioner for purging the Church of ignorant, scandalous, and inefficient ministers. There is no evidence and no probability that he was an active member of these bodies. The ignorant, scandalous, and inefficient clergy of Somersetshire can hardly have suffered much from him during his sick leave at Bridgewater, even if he went there, and by the end of September he was back on his proper element. His name would appear in the Parliament and on the commission simply because it was Cromwell's obvious interest to include the greatest possible number of Englishmen of distinction among the open supporters of his Government.

His appointment as one of the commissioners of the navy was undoubtedly more than a matter of form. By this time he must have possessed a wider knowledge of naval affairs than any living Englishman. If he had not the seamanship of Lawson, Penn, or Stayner, he had, what they had not, a long familiarity with the administration of the service. Still, even in his own

line, it was as admiral at sea that he was employed. From the end of 1654 till his death in August, 1657, he was cruising incessantly. The duties of his office were varied enough. Like so many of his successors, and not a few of the naval officers even of to-day, he had far more to do than merely look after the discipline of his squadron and fight on occasion. He had to negotiate with foreign princes, and co-operate in carrying out the policy of his Government, acting on secret and often contingent instructions, choosing on his own responsibility the time and means for attaining the end imposed on him by Cromwell.

In the earlier part of 1654 he was engaged in the Channel. The Dutch war was at an end, but there was plenty to do in enforcing the Navigation Act, which forbade the employment of Dutch vessels in the English carrying trade. Then, too, there were those familiar pests, the privateers of Dunkerque and St. Maloes. At the present moment they were sure to be particularly active. Cromwell's Government was in a state of active, though unavowed hostility, both to France and Spain. During the summer of 1654 a great armament was preparing in England, and as yet there was some doubt as to its destination. The French suspected that it was designed against them, and especially against the Duke of Guise, who was preparing for that astounding expedition of his to Naples. The Spaniards believed that it was meant for the West Indies. They were right, and little credit to their sagacity either, for they had fair warning. Cromwell had already demanded free trade with America, and the exemption of Englishmen from the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, and had received the well-known

answer from Don Alonso de Cardenas, 'My master has but two eyes, and you ask him for both'. The expedition of Venables and Penn to the West Indies, and the entry of Blake into the Mediterranean, were the Protector's countercheck-quarrelsome to Don Alonso's quip-courteous.

In deciding to put out his Catholic Majesty's eyes, Cromwell was doing a thoroughly popular thing. His enemies, after the Restoration, and his critics since, have accused him of committing a great blunder in this attack on Spain, on the ground that he was helping on the advance of the French power. Both forget that the Protector took guarantees. The possession of Dunkerque and Mardyk would have enabled a Government directed with half his ability and courage to stop any French attack on the Low Countries easily. When the two expeditions sailed, Englishmen were more concerned in trying to obtain the right of trade to the West Indies, and in chaining up the Inquisition, than in quarrelling against France, which was still torn by the war of the Fronde. The trade question was and remained a standing cause of quarrel which flamed up a century later into the too notorious war of Jenkins' Ear. The Inquisition was already in a comparatively harmless state, but it was still capable of mischief and the memory of its former vigour was lively. English skippers and even residents in Spanish towns got on, for the most part, well enough with the natives, but every now and then the Holy Office would seize on one of them for some real or imaginary attempt at proselytism, and then their case was evil indeed. A brother of Admiral Penn's, settled as a merchant at Seville, was

imprisoned and ruined for being so ill-advised as to marry a Spanish woman. Penn took a limited revenge by grievously ill-treating an unlucky Spanish gentleman whom he found in a Royalist prize. To give the same answer to the Inquisition on a much larger scale would have greatly pleased the seamen, all the more that it could so easily be combined with the seizure of West Indian islands, and the capture of Plate ships whereof the sailor dreamt.

Two expeditions left England about the same time to attack Spain. Penn and Venables sailed for the West Indies with six thousand soldiers, Blake left about the same time for the Straits with five-and-twenty sail. It is characteristic of the beautiful irregularity of people's ideas as to international relations in those times that Blake had no orders to make a general attack on Spain. By a convenient extension of the good old principle 'There is no peace beyond the line,' Cromwell felt justified in making a limited war. He resolved to attack so much of Spain as was trade with the West Indies, and no more. For the rest, nothing was to be done till news came from Penn and Venables—nothing at least which could frighten the Spaniard into stopping the Plate fleet. In the meantime there was plenty for the squadron to do.

In the first place there was a settlement to be made with the Italian prince who had harboured Rupert, and then there were the Barbary pirates to be argued with. During the early months of 1655 Blake was on the coast of Italy and Sicily, enforcing the arguments of diplomatists by a timely display of force. That a satisfactory arrangement was made is certain, but there is

less reason for believing that it was done in the pleasant way reported by tradition. According to this authority, which is always so much more agreeable than trustworthy, Blake first forced the Duke of Tuscany to pay a handsome sum by threatening to bombard Leghorn, and then did a thing infinitely pleasing to the English mind in its then unregenerate condition. The duke excused himself from paying all he was asked for, on the ground that many of Rupert's prizes had been sold in the Papal States. Blake, nothing loth, sailed for Cività Vecchia, and threatened to come up to Rome itself if sixty thousand ducats were not paid, and that speedily. Hereupon, in much trepidation, the Pope and Cardinals found the money, the only bullion ever sent from the Eternal City to England to counterbalance the vast sums carried in the opposite direction. The modesty of the story is in its favour, for if tradition did put her hand to making it, there seems no reason why she should have stopped there. It would have been just as easy for her to represent Blake as having treated the Pope, or at least a Cardinal, as Amyas Leigh did the Bishop of Carthagena.

Whether the English admiral schooled the Italian princes precisely in this fashion or not, his mere presence on their coasts, with a fleet manifestly capable of sweeping the Mediterranean, was a useful lesson. During the Dutch war, a handful of English ships under the command of Captain Badiley had been blockaded by Van Galen in Leghorn, and when they had been irritated into recapturing the 'Phœnix' from the Hollanders by a very dashing piece of cutting out, the duke had compelled them to put to sea, where they were overpowered by numbers. Badiley had unquestionably infringed

the neutrality of the Tuscan port, but not until the Dutch had been allowed to do so. The Italian princes believed the States to be the strongest of the sea powers, and it was part of Cromwell's vigorous foreign policy to disabuse them. This had been effected by the cruise of Blake's squadron.

From the coast of Tuscany, the Romagna, and Naples, through waters which were to be familiar enough with the red, white, and blue ensigns in future days, Blake proceeded to the coast of Sicily. Here, although he well knew that the ultimate object of his cruise was an attack on Spain, he had no scruple in applying to the Spanish Viceroys, who still ruled, and for half a century were to rule over the island, for leave to revictual his squadron, on the ground of the friendly relations of the two countries, and indeed the work immediately on hand touched the Italians and Spaniards as nearly as the English. He was about to proceed against the Barbary pirates who were *hostes humani generis*, and particularly the foes of the peoples of the Mediterranean shore. Ever since Barbarossa, the renegade, had founded the great piratical power of Algiers, the towns of the Barbary coast, from Tripoli to Sallee, had been sending out swarms of these skimmers of the waves. A horde of renegades, owing a nominal obedience to the Sultan, came forth every summer in light-built craft, swift under sail and easy to row, crowded with fighting men and slaves for the oar. The most renowned of these leaders were Christian renegades. Barbarossa and his brother were Calabrians, and their successors had been as themselves. In the early seventeenth century two Englishmen, Sir Francis Verney, a Buckinghamshire squire, and

a deserter from the navy named Ward, had been conspicuous among the pirate chiefs. They and their like not only plundered ships, but made forays on the coasts of Spain and Italy in search of slaves, the most valuable form of booty. The exiled Moriscoes delighted to show them the way to the least defensible points of Andalusia and Valencia. Cervantes, who, as all men know, had himself suffered a long captivity; the lesser Spanish story writers; the authors of the 'Novelas de Picaros'; and Le Sage, all use capture and imprisonment among the Barbary pirates as familiar incidents in a tale of adventure. To this day, when a Spaniard wishes to warn you to be on the look-out for squalls, he says with solemn gaze, 'Hay Moros por la costa'—the Moors are on the coast. Verney, Ward, and many another of different races, helped to fill the slave-markets and harems of the East with Christian captives. In 1655 the power of the slave-hunting States had somewhat diminished. The days when twenty of Ward's ships could be destroyed by a Spanish admiral at once without seriously weakening the strength of the pirates were gone; but Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli were still sending out cruisers which returned in most cases full of merchandise taken from the Christians, and each with its string of men strong enough for labour, and women or children beautiful enough to be saleable. The captives were exhibited naked in the slave-market for the Dey to choose his percentage, and the residue was then sold. A large proportion of the men turned renegades, and became slave-hunters in their turn. Few of the famous leaders of early times, if any, were Turks or Arabs by race.

English commerce had suffered like the rest, and on

one shameful occasion, already mentioned, a Flemish renegade had plundered Baltimore, on the south coast of Ireland. It is only the other day that the ludicrous misappropriation of the charity known as Smith's Poor Kindred reminded Englishmen that it was once a pious duty to provide for the ransom of captives of our race. As yet little had been done to protect our commerce from these attacks. Elizabeth had negotiated, and James had sent a fleet which did nothing effectual. Charles and the Parliament had been too busy on other things. There were accordingly always a number of English prisoners in the Barbary ports, sometimes as many as from two to three hundred in Algiers alone. Some of them were men of education who have left written accounts of their miseries. These narratives do not altogether support the familiar stories of wanton cruelty exercised on the slaves. In most cases they seem to have fallen into the hands of humane or even only indifferent masters, who, in consideration of a small daily payment, allowed them to work for themselves. Still, such negative good treatment was a poor consolation for exile and slavery.

At some time in the course of March Blake was off Algiers attempting to come to an arrangement with the Dey. It does not seem to have been any part either of his instructions or of his intentions to fight if he could effect his object by negotiations. He was prepared to buy the release of English captives. There is something grotesque, and at times revolting, in the solemn negotiations undertaken by English consuls and captains with the Dey of Algiers. It seems hardly credible that the representatives of England should ever have had to argue

solemnly with the barbarian chief of a population of kidnappers, with intent to persuade him that the average price of an English man or woman should be so many ducats, and should have to haggle over the money value of their own flesh and blood. Sometimes when a bargain had been made it was found that the goods delivered were not according to invoice. This, that, and the other slave were missing. Then the consul or the admiral expostulated, and was informed that the articles in question had passed by lawful sale into the hands of third parties, and could not be recovered. Occasionally the Dey lost his temper, and furiously asked whether the dogs of unbelievers thought his patience had no end. It must be remembered, however, that kidnapping and slave-holding were not considered sins in themselves by our fathers, not even when the victims were Englishmen. The colonies were largely recruited by these very means. In James's reign a couple of impostors excited a panic among the female population of the Western counties by giving out, for purposes of extortion, that they were commissioned by the King to press young women for Virginia. So little did their story appear incredible, that many girls ran away and hid themselves. During the Civil Wars strings of Cavalier and Scotch prisoners were exported to the plantations of Barbadoes, Virginia, and New England. Lord Macaulay has told how the Queen and the Maids of Honour turned an honest penny on the prisoners after the Western rising in 1685. Kidnapping for the plantations was an active criminal industry, as may be seen by Defoe's novels and the very authentic history of Esquemeling, the buccaneer. In the seventeenth

century, therefore, Englishmen, though they would exert themselves for their countrymen enslaved in Algiers or Tunis, did not do it with any lively horror at slavery itself. Any such feeling would have been even a trifle ridiculous, in Bristol, for instance, whose every brick was cemented with the blood of a nigger, as the drunken actor reminded the townsmen. When captives had to be rescued from the Algerines there was no consideration of sentiment to prevent Englishmen from making a bargain, and keeping the employment of force as a reserve in case the Dey proved unreasonable.

In the last days of March Blake arrived at Tunis, and found the Dey even more insolent than his brother at Algiers. He would neither hear of taking ransom nor give securities for the future, nor even allow the squadron to buy bread and water. Blake, according to the writer who invented various other sayings for him, hereupon twirled his whiskers, meaning his moustache doubtless, and sententiously observed that bread and water were the common right of humanity. He was certainly guiltless of this large and withal pointless assertion, but the twirling of the moustache is just possible. His portraits represent him as clean-shaven, but they are of little authority, and he may have worn a moustache, as Cromwell and Ireton did. With or without the gesture, he warned the Dey to take care, and was promptly told to look at the forts and ships.

The Dey's confidence in his forts and fighting vessels was by no means without justification. Tunis, which is near by the ruins of Carthage, lies in a position designed by nature for a great seaport. It is at the bottom, or, as the seamen of the seventeenth century would have

said, in the cod of a wedge-shaped bay. Cape Bon to the east, and Biserta, itself a naval station made to the hand of any power with intelligence to use it, to the west, mark the seaward ends. Before Tunis could be reached, Porto Farina and the great fortress known as the Goletta must be mastered. It had been taken and lost in the wars of Charles V. and Don John of Austria. Cervantes had been there with Don John two years after Lepanto, and while he was still a soldier in the tercio of Don Lope de Figueroa. He has described the loss of the town, when Philip II., with all his usual procrastination and meanness, allowed it to be taken by Uluch Ali, in the story of the captive Ruy Perez de Viedma. Since it had fallen into the hands of the true believers, it had been a pirate stronghold of only less fame than Algiers itself. Now the Dey was confident in his power to repel any assault. He drew his nine cruisers up in front of the mole of Porto Farina, and defied the English to come on.

Though Blake must have resolved already to take him at his word, he did not accept the challenge at once. Leaving a squadron to watch the port, he took the heavier ships to the coast of Sardinia. This measure has been accounted for by his need of provisions, but Blake cannot have expected to find munitions of war at Cagliari, and no others were wanted for an attack on Tunis. It is more probable that he was anxious to avoid a bombardment if he could, for the town was part of the dominions of the Sultan, and it was not the interest of England, which had a great Levant trade, to quarrel with the sovereign of Turkey. He might therefore be willing to try whether a blockade

would not tame the obstinacy of the Dey, and would profit by the interval to water his ships. When he returned, the Tunisian was as obstinate as ever. It was now necessary, if our trade was not to be ruined by the insolence of the pirates, to show them that the patience of England was due to policy, not to pusillanimity.

On April 4 Blake entered Tunis Bay with his fleet in two squadrons. One, formed of the lighter ships, consisted of the 'Newcastle,' 'Taunton,' 'Foresight,' 'Amity,' 'Princess Maria,' 'Pearl,' 'Mermaid,' and 'Merlin'. The second included the 'George' (Blake's flagship), the 'Andrew,' 'Plymouth,' 'Worcester,' 'Unicorn,' 'Bridgewater,' and 'Success'. They stood in with the sea breeze early in the forenoon, and took up their positions, each ship, as in the case of Lord Exmouth's bombardment of Algiers, probably anchoring by the stern within musket shot of the batteries and armed moles. Once in their places they opened fire in answer to the cannonade of the Turks and Tunisians. The object of their attack was Porto Farina, in front of which were moored the Dey's nine cruisers. Blake's own squadron engaged the forts at musket range or less, while his light squadron was to tackle the ships. Before long the Dey must have begun to discover that he had overlooked one important consideration in his calculation of forces, and that was the respective efficiency of his own men and the English as gunners. The very slight loss of Blake's fleet shows that the practice of the Tunisians must have been very bad. When Sir Charles Napier, noisiest and dirtiest of British seamen, bombarded Acre two centuries afterwards, Mehemet Ali's artillerymen fixed their guns at a certain range, on the

calculation that the English must anchor just there. Unluckily for them, Sir Charles took his ships much nearer, so that the Egyptian bullets went screaming harmlessly through his spars. Something of the sort may have happened on April 4, 1655. Moreover, the sea breeze which blew steadily in throughout the engagement, sent the smoke of the English guns rolling over the forts, to the confusion of what aim the Tunisians did try to take. Before long the effect of Blake's steady hail of well-directed shot began to be visible. The forts were shattered; the guns dismounted, and the moles swept. Then when the fire from the batteries was well beaten down, the English long-boats and cutters were manned, and driven through the smoke straight at the pirate ships. Cutlasses, boarding pikes, and pistols made quick work of whatever opposition was offered on their decks, and every one of them was soon in flames. When the English stood out to sea that evening with the satisfaction of men who had at last done a long wished for piece of work, and done it well, Porto Farina was rudely shattered, and the nine ships the Dey had pointed out to their attention a few days before were hopelessly blazing before his eyes. There were men in the forecastles of the fleet who had sailed the Mediterranean in fear, or had even stood in the slave-market, and who must have turned in that night with the feeling that they had at last paid a good instalment of a long score.

The letter in which Blake, who was by no means sure that this attack on a vassal of the Sultan would be approved of, reported his action to the Protector deserves quotation. After giving an account of the abortive negotiations for a peaceful settlement, he goes on, 'Their barbarous provocations did so work upon

our spirits that we judged it necessary for the honour of the fleet, our nation, and religion, seeing they would not deal with us as friends, to make them feel us as enemies, and it was thereupon resolved, at a council of war, to endeavour the firing of their ships at Porto Farina. The better to effect the same we drew off again, and sailed to Trapani, so that they might be the more sure. After a stay of some days there, we set sail back for Porto Farina, where we arrived the 3rd instant (April) in the afternoon, and met again at a council of war, at which it was resolved, by the permission of God, to put in execution our former intentions. Accordingly, next morning, very early, we entered with the fleet into the harbour, and anchored before their castles, the Lord being pleased to favour us with a gentle gale off the sea, which cast all the smoke upon them and made our work the more easy, for after some hours' dispute we set on fire all their ships, which were nine in number, and, the same favourable gale still continuing, we retreated out again into the Roads. We had 25 men slain and about 40 hurt, with very little other loss. We are even now setting sail to go to Algiers, that being the only place that can afford us a considerable supply of bread and flesh if they will.'

It is a pious and modest account of a valiant action, but like the writing of all the men of the time, except Cromwell, a little colourless, wholly without individuality. Reynolds or Morgan, Lawson or Deane, would have written just such another.

After the lesson taught them at Tunis, the Barbary States became amenable to reason. Captives were released on the payment of a moderate ransom, and promises of good behaviour were made for the future.

Even after the victory, however, there was no attempt on the part of the English to rely on the sword alone. The Algerines were not deprived of their property without compensation, in spite of the dubious character of their right. When some Dutch captives swam off to the English fleet at Algiers, the sailors subscribed a dollar apiece to buy them their freedom. Blake even tried to recover some Turks, who were prisoners in the hands of the Knights of St. John at Malta, and had a tiff of fighting with these military monks who were every whit as great slave-hunters as the Algerines.

This cruise is one of the most important in the history of the English navy. The mere fighting alone was of what it is convenient, though possibly a little pompous, to call an epoch-making character, for the attack on Porto Farina was the first thing of its kind done on a large scale and with complete success. Clarendon went beyond his text when he said that Blake first taught sailors to despise castles on shore, but he was not speaking without book. The Earl of Essex—the Parliament's earl, not Elizabeth's—had battered down a fort at Cadiz with a single ship, long before, and a few other such pieces of service were done elsewhere. Still the bombardment of Porto Farina, and the burning of the Dey's nine war-vessels, was one of those conspicuous pieces of fighting which all the world sees and remembers. Sailors did not learn then, and have not learnt since, to despise castles on shore when the said castles are too strong to be attacked. But they did prove that some castles may be tackled with success, and with practice they got to put the standard of manageable strength much higher than it

had ever been before. The capture of Cadiz in Elizabeth's reign was, it must not be forgotten, the work of the land forces, and moreover the town, which was one of the strongest in Europe in Blake's time, was then very inadequately fortified.

The novelty of the work Blake did in this cruise was, however, not a mere matter of fighting. British seamen have on few occasions shown themselves backward to go where they were ordered. The originality of what the Protector's fleet did in the Mediterranean during the early months of 1655 lay in this, that it marked the end of the period in which our merchant ships were expected to protect themselves, and the beginning of the better time in which they have had the fleet always at hand to protect them. Elizabeth had negotiated for her merchants, and had fought on occasion. James had threatened strong measures and had sent a squadron to Algiers. It had, however, done nothing Englishmen had not every reason to forget. Neither of these sovereigns, and still less Charles, had been able to follow out a consistent policy designed to make foreigners understand that a wrong done to the meanest of Englishmen was an insult to England which would be vigorously avenged. Blake's cruise taught this lesson. He had made the round of the Mediterranean with an irresistible fleet, showing the flag, insisting on a settlement of old accounts, and letting princes or pirates see the force which could and would come to the help of every aggrieved subject of the rulers of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1655 the navy came to its majority. It passed from being the protector of the shores of England, and the force which could carry

out an isolated enterprise, into the permanent armed chivalry of the sea always at hand to protect all those who go upon the sea on their lawful occasions, and the untiring enemy of the enemies of mankind, the pirates who are *hostes humani generis*.

On his way home, Blake had an opportunity of showing the Spaniards how dangerous it had become to meddle rashly with Englishmen. The story cannot be told without a warning. It rests on the authority of Bishop Burnet alone, and is therefore not beyond question. Still the bishop has not been shown to be a liar for the love of the thing, and in this case he unites two of the qualities required to make a trustworthy witness. He had the means of knowing the truth, and no motive not to tell it. The story, the best known of all told about Blake, is this. The fleet put in at Malaga on its way home, and was well received. Observe—Venables and Penn were bungling over their attack on San Domingo during these very months, and were seizing Jamaica, there being, according to the international law of the time, no peace beyond the line. While the fleet was at anchor in the Roads leave was given to the men. One of the sailors was so rash, or so brutal, or so good a Puritan, or perhaps only so careless, as to do something which the Spaniards interpreted into an insult to a religious procession. A monk of notorious and popular piety egged the bystanders on to handle the heretic roughly. The man got out of their hands, and complained to Blake of the assault. Hereupon, the English admiral presented a demand for the punishment of the monk to the Viceroy, and was told that the civil authorities had no power over the Church. The answer, if given, was a cool lie, for the Viceroys of the King of

Spain had abundant power to punish ecclesiastics for common offences. Of this Blake was doubtless well aware. He at once answered that, these things being so, if the monk was not given up to him, he would at the end of a certain time open fire on Malaga. As the interval for repentance was drawing to an end, and the fleet, with its decks cleared for action, was preparing for a repetition of the affair of Porto Farina, a shore boat came alongside with the monk. Then, on the quarter-deck of the 'George,' Blake made his great declaration touching the rights of the British subject. He told the monk that this act of submission was enough, that he should not hang him. If the Viceroy had complained of the sailor, he himself would have punished him, but as the Spaniards had taken the law into their own hands, he must make them understand that Englishmen were only to be judged by Englishmen. With that he sent the too zealous monk back. When Cromwell heard this story he was greatly delighted, and uttered his famous saying, 'I will make the name of Englishman to be as much dreaded as ever was the name of *civis Romanus*'—the first assertion of a policy now somewhat fallen into disuse.

The tale is supported by dubious direct evidence, and yet it is intrinsically not improbable. Even those who are punctilious in demanding good security for Sir John, must allow Burnet's to be better than Bardolph's. The direct statement of a well-informed contemporary, who was doubtless somewhat credulous but not wilfully mendacious, may be allowed to weigh against the silence of State papers. We are drifting into an exclusive respect for whatever has been buried in a barrel at the

Record Office, and brought to light by means of a Calendar of State Papers. The probabilities are on the whole in favour of Burnet. Blake knew well how Spain and England stood, and what was the policy of the Protector. In these very months he was in receipt of orders to intercept the Plate ships, and was about to cruise for them off Cadiz. He must unquestionably have shared in the general desire and determination of his countrymen, to teach the Inquisition once and for all to let Englishmen alone. The action of the monk would give him an excellent opening. His man was undoubtedly in the wrong, but the question at issue was whether Spanish ecclesiastics were or were not to be sole judges of what was an offence against their religion. It could scarcely have been brought to the test better than by some such event as this, and there is no ground for denying Blake the courage and self-reliance needed to act as he is said to have done. The moderation of the story is also in its favour, for it does not make him claim impunity for Englishmen who insulted the Roman Catholic religion, but only their right not to be left at the arbitrary disposal of the clergy. For the rest, the story, if not actually true, has what Mr. Carlyle was in the habit of calling a mythical truth. Blake was employed during all these months in doing just what the story said he did. Its popularity, and the general credence it received, made it an example to succeeding naval officers. While he was on the southern coast of Spain, all England was shocked into rage by the persecution of the Protestants of Piedmont. The recent memory of Porto Farina, and the knowledge that the fleet was there, must have helped to induce the Duke of Savoy to listen to Milton's Latin.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CHASING THE PLATE SHIPS.

Unfortunately for the officers and men of H.M. ships and vessels of war, the words Register ship, Plate ship, Acapulco ship, are now words of little meaning. Never again will it be written that the British frigates 'Naiad,' Captain William Pierrepoint, 'Ethalion,' Captain James Young, 'Triton,' Captain John Gore, and 'Alcmene,' Captain Henry Digby, have arrived at Plymouth with the Spanish Register ships 'Thetis' and 'Santa Brigida,' and that the prize money received by the captors was as follows:—

| | | £ | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Captains . . . . | each | 40,730 | 18 | 0 |
| Lieutenants . . . . | ,, | 5091 | 7 | 3 |
| Warrant officers . . | ,, | 2468 | 10 | 9 |
| Petty officers . . . | ,, | 791 | 17 | 0 |
| Seamen and marines . | ,, | 182 | 4 | 9 |

The same seamen and marines will no more be seen roaming about Portsmouth with bank notes stuck in their hats, buying watches for the fun of frying them, and issuing laws that any of their crews who appeared without a gold-laced hat should be cobbed, so that the

unlucky man who appeared in silver could only escape by representing that the costlier articles were all bought up, but he had compelled the shopkeeper to take money for gold lace. This spectacle was, however, to be seen in our ports during the seventeenth and the last century. The capture of the 'Thetis' and 'Santa Brigida' happened in 1799.

From the time that Francis Drake captured the 'Cacafuego,' it had been the dream of the English sailor to have the same luck. The prize was worth fighting for, as the case of these two ships shows. And they were by no means the biggest haul of the kind which came into the naval net. Sir Charles Wager made 100,000*l.* of prize money by one such capture in the good times of Queen Anne. The wealth of Spain was a great object of desire to Protestant England in earlier times, and to commercial England in later. To Spain herself, it was of little use. She and Portugal were, in Adam Smith's phrase, 'the two most beggarly nations in Europe,' while their fleets brought home bullion to the value of millions every few years. Latterly, little of it was even landed in Spain. The Spaniards of the seventeenth century were the *Damnati ad metalla* of Europe, in the classical language of the time. The gold and silver they dug from their mines supplied the market of Europe, but the greater part of it was transferred into Dutch ships at sea to meet the bills of the Spanish Government, which has anticipated its revenue from time immemorial, and was compelled by its necessities to connive at this violation of its own laws against the export of the precious metals, but for whoever could catch it on blue water the gain was clear.

And what a booty it was! Once every year there came a great galleon from the Philippines to Acapulco, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, laden with wealth which was to be exchanged for that part of the produce of the Mexican mines not shipped for Europe. This was the booty of Drake, Cavendish, and Anson. The gold of Peru, the silver of Potosi, the emeralds of what is now called Ecuador, were stored at Guayaquil, and then carried in great treasure-ships, built long and sharp below the water line, to work up against the prevailing westerly winds of the Pacific coast of South America, to Panama. Panama contributed its own share in the form of pearls fished out of the Gulf called by the Spaniards, who first saw it from the peak in Darien, the South Sea. Long *recuas* of mules and slaves—the word has been made familiar by 'Westward Ho!'—carried the treasure over the Isthmus, where the galleons were waiting for it. The fleets from Panama and La Vera Cruz met in the West Indies, and filled up with the produce of the islands. Then with their gold, silver, quicksilver, precious stones and pearls, stowed away under the captain's cabin, and their holds full of sugar, tobacco, hides, and dye wood, they took their way for Europe. These priceless cargoes were carried in great galleons of from twelve to eighteen hundred tons, armed with from forty to sixty cannon. A crowd of small craft accompanied them as tenders, to supply them with provisions in case of need, and to keep a look-out for enemies. The voyage was broken at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where the Spaniards had kept a garrison ever since the Elizabethan seamen had made the Canaries their rendezvous to wait for the

treasure-ships. Here in time of war they were met by swift craft from Spain, to tell them whether the coast was clear, or to warn them to stop if a Dutch or English fleet was cruising outside of Cadiz. Even in its last stage of decadence the Austrian dynasty had never wholly neglected the treasure-ships. When its other men-of-war were rotting in harbour, they were kept in a tolerably efficient state. The officers and crews were generally Basques, or at least seamen from the north coast, and strong bodies of picked soldiers served as marines.

To get their arms up to the elbows into all this mass of wealth was the dearest ambition of generations of seamen. To prevent the Spanish Government from using it in support of the Catholic power was no less an object with the rulers of England. Hence those innumerable voyages to the islands (*i.e.*, the Canaries and Azores) which fill the naval annals of Elizabeth's reign. Raleigh and Cumberland, Hawkins and Drake, gentlemen captains and tarpaulin captains, had cruised for months waiting for the great prize. For the most part they had cruised in vain. The Spaniards had too many harbours of refuge, were too cautious to be easily caught by a big fleet, and when sighted by small squadrons were commonly too strong to be attacked. In 1628, the Dutchman Pieter Hein captured a treasure fleet, but this was a solitary case. It was enough to encourage others to try for the same luck though. Even in time of peace the treasure-ships were never quite safe, and any one of them which fell behind by accident made the rest of her voyage in fear and trembling. In a later generation the Plate fleet was attacked at its very place

of lading. The buccaneers, whose heroic period lies between 1660 and 1690, grabbed at the booty even before it was on board. It was with this object that Morgan made his wonderful march across the mountains to Panama, and that 'that great sea artist and valiant commander, Captain Bartholomew Sharp,' and others, seized canoes in the South Sea, and fell upon the coasts of Peru. In 1684 the buccaneers, English, Dutch, and French, sacked Guayaquil, and there found the accumulated treasure of years, wealth beyond the drunkenest dreams of Wapping; but the feats of the buccaneer power, that picturesque phase of the secular struggle for the trade of America, do not belong in any way to the life of Blake.

The export trade to the Spanish colonies was managed in much the same way. Those parts of the Catholic King's dominions which were allowed to trade with the colonies at all, and the privilege was limited to territory of the crown of Castile, were compelled to conduct all their business through the city of Seville. Ships were laden for America in early times at the capital of Andalusia itself, but when the galleons had grown too big to be brought up the Guadalquivir, then at San Lucar de Barrameda, Puerto de Santa Maria, and Cadiz. A squadron cruising off the mouth of the Straits was therefore exactly in position to catch the Spaniards at their going out and their coming in.

Blake was to be employed on this work for the rest of his life. From the spring of 1655 till the September of that year he was cruising between the coast of Africa and Lisbon, waiting for the Plate fleet which never came, and watching for the outward-bound ships which

never put to sea. In 1656 he returned to the same waters on the same task, and went back to England only to die at the mouth of Plymouth Sound. Other work had to be done incidentally, but the great object was always the treasure. Cromwell was thoroughly determined to break down the power of Spain in the West Indies. Motives of a political, commercial, and religious kind made him resolute on that point, but he does not seem to have desired a war with Spain in Europe. If Philip IV. had been prepared to play the game according to Cromwell's rules, to have war beyond the line and for the American trade alone, it would seem that the Protector would have been content to leave the coast of Spain and its European commerce in peace. This seems, from our point of view, a monstrous pretension, but it is astonishing for how long the Government at Madrid was prepared to accept it tacitly. The fleet under Penn and Venables, which had sailed from England in December, 1654, almost at the same time as Blake's squadron, had committed an undoubted aggression on the Spanish possessions. It had attacked San Domingo, and taken Jamaica, but Philip did not declare war for months. Possibly he may have thought that the expedition was sufficiently punished by its own mishaps, for indeed this great buccaneering business was on the whole a lamentable failure. Of the six thousand men it carried, few ever found their way back to England. Penn and Venables quarrelled, the soldiers began by being disorderly and ended by showing themselves cowards. They were to a large extent old Royalists, who went to the West Indies because they were ruined at home, and the King's soldiers were at

no time famous for their discipline. The attack on San Domingo failed shamefully, and Jamaica, though it was taken with little trouble, was then nearly waste, and proved for a long time a very costly possession. But if Philip IV. was prepared to let things rest as they were, Cromwell was not. On the contrary, he was only the more resolute to make the Plate fleets pay for the failure in the West Indies.

In June of 1655, before bad news had come from the Antilles, Blake had orders of a sufficiently intelligible sort. In answering the admiral's report of the attack on Tunis the Protector let him know that 'we, having taken into consideration the present design we have in the West Indies, have judged it necessary that not only the King of Spain's fleets coming from thence be intercepted (which as well your former instructions as those now sent unto you require and authorise you to do), but that we endeavour also, as much as in us lies, to hinder him from sending any relief or assistance thither. You are therefore, during your abode with the fleet in those seas, to inform yourself by the best means you can concerning the going of the King of Spain's fleet for the West Indies: and shall, according to such information as you can gain, use your best endeavour to intercept at sea and fight with and take them, or otherwise to fire and sink them; as also any other of his ships which you shall understand to be bound for the West Indies with provisions of war for the aid and assistance of his subjects there; carrying yourself towards others of his ships and people as you are directed by your general instructions.' To carry out this policy, which grew stricter as time went on,

and ended in general war, was the purpose of Blake's two years' cruise.

Nothing is harder to realise than what this blockading work must have meant. From May, 1655, until August, 1657, twenty-seven months in all, Blake was occupied with few intervals in sailing to and fro between two given points. The incidents which break this monotonous patrolling were the return for a brief space to England, Stayner's attack on the Marquis of Badajoz, and the bombardment of Santa Cruz. In the intervals the admiral's work cannot have been much more interesting than the daily rounds of the policeman, and can as little be told, even if the biographer were to apply himself, as Gustave Flaubert once deliberately did, to exciting in the mind of his reader an intense feeling of boredom. Sir Harris Nicolas has quoted some pages from the log of Nelson's flagship during the long blockade of Toulon. They mark the movements of the fleet for the day, the number of tacks made, the sails set and taken in, and then set again, the changes in the weather, and the number of knots traversed in this direction or in that. Multiply these pages by a hundred, and you will probably attain to as distinct a conception as can possibly be obtained without actual experience of what the average work of the navy was in the old wars. The battles which fill the histories were the exception, the blockades were the rule. And they were something altogether different from the intervals of marching, or garrison work, or mere camping which lie between the soldier's days of combat. The sailor was shut off from the rest of mankind, and was not only unable to secure variety, but even to get privacy. He passed months in the discharge of the

same duties, among surroundings which never varied, and hardships great even to men brought up from boyhood to a hard life. It is not to be wondered at if the sailors indemnified themselves for the monastic seclusion of their life on board by rough dissipation when they got on shore. The extraordinary rancour and pertinacity of naval quarrels may be accounted for, if not excused, on the same grounds.

In the middle of the seventeenth century blockading work was new to the English fleet, and was harder than it ever became in later times. During Elizabeth's reign cruises had been of short duration. Drake and Cavendish had indeed been absent on their great voyages of circumnavigation for two years on a stretch, but they spent much of that time in harbours on the American coast or among the islands of the Indian Ocean. Until Blake set the example, it was an unheard of thing to keep a great fleet at sea all through the winter, and even he and his immediate successors were in the habit of sending the heavier ships home at the approach of the stormy months. Indeed, the difficulty of keeping a large naval force at a distance from England was fifty times greater than it was in the eighteenth century. Until Rooke took Gibraltar, we had not a single naval station in foreign European waters. A squadron in the Mediterranean had to depend for supplies on ships sent out from home, or on what it could get for love or money in neutral ports. The Admiralty correspondence of the time is full of appeals from admirals and complaints of the state of their squadrons, and of promises of relief on the part of the commissioners, and notices of vessels fitting out to carry stores to the fleet in the Straits.

The method of supply was uncertain, and at the best of times desperately slow. Purchase in the neutral ports was not always a quicker method, and was even more uncertain. When Penn was left in the Mediterranean in 1650, to look after the remains of Rupert's fleet, he found the utmost difficulty in keeping his half-dozen frigates supplied with provisions during his wanderings to and fro. His diaries bristle with entries showing how hard he found it to obtain meat, bread, and the beverage wine which was served out to the men in place of the beer they received in the Channel. Spanish viceroys and Italian princes had to be first persuaded to allow the purchases to be made. Then syndics and such like municipal authorities had to be got to exert themselves to make the bakers bake at a reasonable price. Often enough the syndics were far from willing to allow, or, where they could not prevent it, to encourage this sudden increase of demand in the local market, on the intelligible ground that it either raised prices for the citizens or caused discontent among the tradesmen. Occasionally an English admiral had to have recourse to threatening language before he could obtain leave to buy even the most necessary provisions. When the neutral states were unfriendly, or at a distance from the cruising ground of the fleet, these difficulties were proportionately increased. As a matter of course they reached the sailor in the shape of reductions of a quarter or half in his rations, for which he was, however, entitled to be compensated in money.

As the commercial interests of England in the Mediterranean increased, and as her fleets began to make it a regular cruising ground, the want of a port

in which ships could be repaired, and stores collected, began to be acutely felt. In the eighteenth century it was supplied by the occupation of Gibraltar and Port Mahon; and when Minorca had been lost, by Malta. The chain of posts has been completed in these times by the occupation of Cyprus and Egypt. Tangier had been accepted as part of the dower of Catharine of Braganza, largely in hope that it would serve the turn; and long before this the need of a dockyard and harbour of refuge in or near the Mediterranean had been felt. Some, at least, of Elizabeth's officers had seen the evacuation of Cadiz with regret; while Cromwell, with prophetic sagacity, fixed on another point of the Spanish coast as convenient to be seized and held by England.

The first period of Blake's cruisings after the Plate fleet was barren. In September, 1655, he returned to England, and saw his native land, and perhaps his patrimonial estate in Somerset, for the last time. A passing notice of his stay in England is to be found in the correspondence of Charles's secretary, Nicholas. The Royalist exile reports a story to the effect that Blake and Montague had been sent to the Downs to pacify the seamen who were half-mutinous because Lawson had been removed from his command. As this rumour, for that is all it seems to have been, agrees with what is known of the admiral's steady fidelity to Cromwell, it may possibly have some truth in it; but the statements of Nicholas and the other adherents of Charles at Breda are only to be accepted with caution. They were exiles—a class of men who are always extremely credulous—and they had to rely for information either on angry partisans, who would see everything through

party spectacles, or on spies, who would say just what seemed to them likely to please their employers. In this very letter, Secretary Nicholas states calmly, with the air of a well-informed person reporting a notorious matter of fact, that 'the discontent among seamen is so general that, if they had known they would have security in the King of Spain's ports, by his having made a fast conjunction with our King, many, nay most of the fleet, would have abandoned Cromwell, who is said to be most odious among the seamen'. Hopeful speculation of this kind is scattered up and down the Royalist correspondence in abundance, and may be taken for what it is worth as evidence of their beliefs and feelings. It contrasts curiously with the steady refusal of their partisans to attempt or even recommend a landing in face of this same mutinous fleet. Nicholas was not the first nor yet the last exile who grounded too great confidence on the grumblings of the British seaman. If Charles had made his fast conjunction with the King of Spain, he would certainly have found, as his brother was destined to do at La Hogue, that the loyalty of the sailors did not extend to making them miss a chance of beating the foreigner. Spanish ports were to be closed to Cromwell's fleet for many months to come, but the only one they sailed into was Santa Cruz, and on that occasion neither his Catholic Majesty nor the son of the late Man profited by their action.

In March, 1656, Blake sailed from Torbay, with Montague as his colleague, in command of a fleet of forty sail. By this time there was open and general war with Spain, so that the admirals went provided with instructions of the sink, burn, and destroy kind.

The ships had not been got ready without trouble. Money was hard to come by, and men could only be collected slowly and in driblets.

In the inevitable course of things the importance of these obstacles was grossly exaggerated in the loose talk of the time. Like other rulers of England, before and afterwards, until the increase of the national wealth, the foundation of the Bank, and the formation of the funded debt, put it in the power of the Treasury to command millions at a few days' notice, Cromwell had his difficulties in finding money. It does not appear that he had more to suffer in this respect than Elizabeth, James, and Charles. He was at least never reduced to the necessity of asking the Spaniards to bribe him to help them against the Dutch, and then begging the Dutch to bribe him to betray the Spaniards. As for the want of men, that was destined to remain a chronic disease. A hundred and sixty years later, when all England was loyal enough, Collingwood describes his ship's company as a motley crew of many nations. He had even once to impress a negro general from San Domingo, and turn him into a topman. There was another fleet fitting out for the West Indies in 1656; and to find crews for both, in face of the competition of the merchant ships, was not easy. In spite of increased pay and better rations, sailors preferred the freedom of the private ships to the strict discipline of the navy.

The pressgang was active, and many an exciting hunt for men went on all over England. The sailors would often take the press money—so far they accepted the system favourably enough—and then desert on their way to the dockyards. 'Southwold,' said Major

Burton, 'was beset by Colonel Brewster's troop, but the officers of the town were so base, they could not get a man; as fast as our people searched one part of the town, they got into the other, although they searched with candles.' The dislike of the men for the naval discipline, the *baseness* of magistrates in the seaports, mostly themselves merchants and shipowners, and the unpopularity of the unhealthy West Indian station, made the manning of the fleets to lag. The complement of Blake and Montague's fleet was at last made up by drafting soldiers on board in the proportion of one to five sailors—which is less than the proportion of marines to blue-jackets usual in later times. After all, they left England better manned than the 'Montague' (74) which, if all tales be true, joined Lord Howe just before June 1, with thirteen seamen on board, and a boy who had been fifteen months at sea as captain of the fore-top.

The work before these forty ships was ultimately the ruin of the Spanish trade and the capture of the much-desired Plate ships; but in the meantime a basis of operations had to be secured. The most convenient ports for the purpose were the Portuguese, and as the Spaniards were still making sporadic attempts to reconquer Portugal, it ought to have been easy enough for the two countries to come to an arrangement. But they had a little independent quarrel of their own. The King had never yet settled the disputes begun when Blake blockaded Rupert in the Tagus. He refused to pay the indemnity claimed for the merchants whose vessels had been taken by the Royalist cruisers and sold at Lisbon. He would not

hear of granting religious liberty to English merchants resident in his capital. He would not promise to send back deserters who professed to have become Catholics. These men were in the habit of claiming their pay, and were supported by the Portuguese authorities—'which may be a colour for any knave to leave his duty, or for the Roman Catholics to seduce our men'. Satisfaction on these points had been promised by the Portuguese ambassador in London, but when Mr. Meadows arrived at Lisbon to secure the ratification of the treaty, it was, in the words of Cromwell's instructions to the admirals, refused 'unless we will agree to submit this article to the determination of the Pope,' and this—horrible suggestion!—amounts to an attempt to 'bring us to an owning of the Pope; which we hope, whatever befall us, we shall not, by the grace of God, be brought unto'. On the indemnity question the King may have thought that the loss of his Brazil fleet in 1650 was satisfaction enough. It is strange that the memory of the events of that year did not open his eyes to the folly of resistance to an overwhelming power, but it has never been easy to persuade the Portuguese that they are the weakest. There is a not unpleasant little fable told by their neighbours, the Spaniards, to the effect that a certain Portuguese once fell into a dry well, and there broke both his legs and an arm. While he was lying in this painful state there came by a Spaniard, who looked down and asked what was the matter. Upon this the Portuguese replied, 'Castilian, if you will help me out of the well I will spare your life'. This was much the frame of mind in which the King received Mr. Meadows. He was soon brought to his senses. Blake and Mon

tague came to support the ambassador, and finding things still unsettled, proceeded to carry out their instructions, which were to seize the Brazil fleet in case the Portuguese proved obstinate. A squadron was left to lie off Cadiz and look after the Spaniards. Then the bulk of the fleet took up the cruising stations occupied by Blake and Popham six years before, and waited for the ships coming back from South America. This spectacle caused his Most Faithful Majesty to reflect. With forty sail of English cruisers stationed along his coast, there was no chance that the Brazil fleet could escape. It was certain to blunder into the middle of them as it had done in 1650. The loss of these ships and of their cargoes would have spelt bankruptcy for his Government and for the whole trading community of Lisbon. When it became clear to him that this misfortune was the alternative to accepting Cromwell's terms, the King at last yielded. On June 5 the five years' wriggling of the Portuguese came to an end. The 'Colchester' went into Lisbon to receive the promised indemnity of 50,000*l.*, equal to at least four times as much of our money, and from her it was transferred into the 'Phœnix' and 'Sapphire,' and sent to England to be divided among the merchants whose ships had been taken off the Berlings by Maurice. It was altogether a very rough, high-handed business on our side from first to last. The King may well have asked, with the purged members in the Queen's Court, by what law he was called upon to refuse to accept Rupert as the representative of the legitimate ruler of England, or to do things offensive to his religious opinions. To which no answer could well have been given except in

the words of Hugh Peters, 'by the law of Necessity; truly by the Power of the Sword'. With all that, it had to be done. It was no longer possible for any State to endure the barbarism which still prevailed in maritime affairs. Rupert was not a pirate, though the Parliament was logically compelled by its position to call him one, but the excuses made for receiving him were of the kind which might have been used often enough to cover much protection of undoubted piracy. When was a foreign State to cease to recognise the commission of an exiled prince? By insisting that it should not be recognised at all, the Long Parliament and Cromwell at least established a precedent which on the whole worked for security on the sea—in future it would be understood that neglect of the rule meant war, and the issues would be clear—a very great gain for the cause of peace. A strict application of the golden rule to the affairs of nations would perhaps condemn interference with the treatment of Protestants by the Portuguese Government. It is certain that neither the Parliament nor Cromwell would have endured the meddling of Continental powers with their policy towards the Catholics. Still, they were, on the whole, advancing the cause of toleration and tacitly binding themselves to give the freedom they demanded. In helping to bring the Portuguese to submission Blake was actively forwarding one of the greatest changes for the better made in the seventeenth century, and completing the work begun by his cruise in the Mediterranean. Hitherto traders had been treated abroad as interlopers, to be tolerated in most cases, but still as needing toleration. They had been, as has been pointed out before,

left very much to shift for themselves by their own Governments. From this time forward a wholly different view prevailed. States were often jealous enough in their commercial policy, but at least they recognised the foreigner's right to do whatever he was not expressly forbidden to do. They also began to act on the principle that a civil wrong done by one to the subjects of another was not only a fair cause of war, but an insult which the Government of the aggrieved side could not tolerate without dishonour. All the teaching of all the moralists in the world has not done so much to secure fair treatment for residents in foreign countries. When Governments had to choose between treating one another's subjects decently, or fighting, they would prefer the first course in the absence of some independent motive for declaring war.

As between England and Portugal themselves, the result of this vigorous policy was a firm alliance. The events of 1650 and 1656 showed the Court of Lisbon how completely it was at the mercy of the stronger power. At the same time it learned that the manifest interest of the English was to have the secure use of Portuguese ports. Between weakness on one side and interest on the other was made the alliance which was strengthened by Charles the Second's marriage, confirmed by the Methuen treaty, fostered by the drinking of much port, and lasted long enough to give the British armies a battlefield in the great struggle with Napoleon. The immediate consequences of the King's surrender were to give Blake the use of Lagos Bay to careen and water his ships in.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CAPTURE OF THE PLATE SHIPS.

THE winding up of the five years' quarrel with Portugal had overlapped the beginning of the operations against Spain. Blake and Montague appear to have proceeded straight from Torbay to Cadiz, and then leaving Stayner with a blockading squadron behind them, to have returned to the mouth of the Tagus to support the diplomacy of Mr. Meadows. As soon as the 'Sapphire' and the 'Phœnix' were on their way to England with the 50,000*l.*, they returned to the main object of their expedition. As the Bay of Biscay seems to have been included in their station, there was plenty for the forty ships under their command to do. The Basque privateers were nearly the only efficient naval force the King of Spain had at his disposal. As soon as the war became general they had begun capturing English merchant ships, and a force had to be despatched from before Lisbon to cut out one of them which had taken a prize into Vigo Bay. As some too speculative and slightly credulous persons in our time have had occasion to know, Vigo Bay was the scene of not the least remarkable incident in the history of English hunting of Spanish treasure, but in this war nothing very famous was done in its waters.

It was six weary months before anything effectual was done in the neighbourhood of Cadiz itself. The blockade begun with a disappointment. Our fleet arrived too late to capture four Spanish galleons coming from the West Indies, and they had the further vexation of learning that twenty-eight sail, three of which were men-of-war, had left for America in safety. 'When we left England,' writes Ths. Pointer of the 'Speaker,' 'we expected to do great things; and should have done but for slackness and false intelligence.' By slackness Mr. Pointer probably meant the delay in fitting the ships for sea, but on the whole the admirals do not seem to have suffered much from want of intelligence, considering how difficult it must have been for them to learn what the Spaniards were doing. Little was to be learnt through Portugal, and even less from chance neutrals who might be met at sea. Perhaps they used the resource recommended by Sir William Monson. This officer, who was in the first and the last fights of the Elizabethan war with Spain, has explained how the English captains contrived to obtain such good information as they did about the movements of the Spanish ships. During the whole of those years of avowed war (it must not be forgotten that the expeditions of Drake and Hawkins were conducted in time of peace), the trade between Spain and England was carried on by Scotch vessels, or by English vessels under the Scotch flag. These craft visited the islands, the southern ports of Spain, and Sallee, which had a steady intercourse with Seville, in great numbers. When the existence of this neutral or illicit traffic is remembered, the ruse recommended by Sir William will

suggest itself at once. He sent small craft under the Scotch flag into the Spanish ports, or what was safer and quite as effectual, he put one of his own officers into a Scottish ship. The Leith or Aberdeen skipper who happened to be in those waters would always be open to a pecuniary arrangement, and with the English smuggler who was flying the St. Andrew's cross there could be no difficulty. An agent was even kept permanently at Sallee to send regular reports of all that was being done or planned at Seville. After Dunbar there was no St. Andrew's cross flying on the sea, and Blake must have been so far hampered; but with Sallee he had relations of the usual kind which prevailed with the piratical Barbary States. He negotiated with its rulers, fought with its cruisers, and protected trade with its merchants. Tangier, still in the possession of Portugal, was open to his ships, and regularly used as a watering place. Between the two he may well have learnt whatever was to be learnt about the movements of the Spaniards.

For the rest, there was little enough to be discovered which his own look-out men could not have seen from the masthead across the narrow spit of land which connects the rocky peninsula of Cadiz with the Isla de Leon. The Spaniards had unrigged their galleons, and laid them up in the inner harbour, or dragged them into the Carraca. There they were to be seen unrigged, unarmed, unmanned, rotting ignobly. Like Napoleon a hundred and sixty years later, the authorities at Madrid had decided to see whether a blockade would not wear the English fleet out. In their case the calculation was better grounded than his, for in the

seventeenth century the use of copper to sheathe the hulls of ships had not been discovered, and a very moderate term of cruising covered their bottoms with barnacles, which destroyed their sailing power. They had to return continually to port to be scraped. Deliberate calculation may have had very little to do with the idleness of the Spanish fleet. It can be adequately accounted for by the penury of the Government. The miserable poverty of the masters of boundless gold and silver had reached such a point that in the previous year the galleons had only been equipped by the voluntary contributions of the merchants of Seville. In 1656 the Spanish Government was on the verge of the act of bankruptcy which completed its financial ruin. By necessity, as much as by choice, it decided to play the waiting game. The garrisons of the seaports were strengthened—it was easier to press soldiers who were hardly fed, scarcely dressed, and never paid, than to equip galleons; something was done to improve the fortifications, and then the Court of Philip IV. waited to see whether wind, and waves, and barnacles would not rid it of the English fleet.

The barnacles did not stick tighter to the bottoms of Blake's ships than his squadron to the mouth of Cadiz harbour. For months the English ships stood in daily, reconnoitred the outer harbour, stood out at night to a safe distance, and lay to till daylight. With the early morning there came a certain amount of diversion, at least during the early times of the blockade. When the bulk of the Spanish ships had been disarmed and laid up, three galleys were still kept in commission, possibly because the alcalde and the cor-

regidor did not know what else to do with the slaves. Every calm night these three poor representatives of a great navy slipped out of port to see if they could not find one of the blockading fleet to worry, and every morning, when the sea was smooth, they pegged away at one or another of the English ships with the big gun they carried in their sharp, ugly snouts. A hundred and fifty years later, when Collingwood was engaged in the same work as Blake, he was annoyed in a similar fashion. Under favourable circumstances the galleys were not altogether contemptible enemies. They were long low craft, rowed by hundreds of slaves. One heavy gun mounted in the bows formed their whole armament. When a dead calm kept the line-of-battle ships idle, they could creep round to the stern of any one which was isolated, take up a position out of reach of the guns of the others, and fire into their big enemy, who was as nearly as might be helpless. But at best they could do little more than fret the blockading fleet. They were compelled to keep their road home open, for the slightest puff of wind which could fill the sails of the line-of-battle ships would bring the galleys under the fire of broadsides, and then there was nothing for it but to show a clean pair of heels. The fight was too unequal between one gun in the bows and forty in the side, and between vessels purposely built as light as possible, and great ships constructed to stand the roughest usage of storm and battle. The galleys had learnt their weakness before the end of the sixteenth century. Francis Drake had given them a memorable lesson in Cadiz Bay itself, when he was about singeing the King of Spain's beard. In 1590 twelve of them

had come to sad grief in an attack on ten merchant ships belonging to the Levant Company. The galleys of the King, commanded by John Andrew Doria, a grandson of Charles V.'s famous admiral, were completely beaten by the English traders, who scarcely suffered at all in the fight. During six hours their fire swept the decks and pierced the hulls of the galleys, till Doria had enough and fled into port at the best speed his surviving slaves—for the broadsides must have made a dreadful butchery among the closely packed banks—could be flogged into giving his damaged vessels. After this the galleys never ventured to attack sailing ships except in a calm. In 1656 they hardly did even all they could. Their commanders were heartily afraid of Blake's broadsides, and kept at such a respectful distance that these encounters led to nothing but waste of powder and shot. It may have been some consolation to the Spaniards to see their flag flying at all on the smooth blue water outside of Cadiz, and the sound of the guns may have provided the people of the town with emotions, but for the English it must have been tepid fun to throw away good ammunition on such feeble and cowardly enemies. The worst of it was that the galleys, despicable as they were at sea, made it impossible for the English boats to try any enterprise in the harbour. Launches and cutters would have been run down by them easily enough.

With nothing to be done for the moment but wait, the English fleet could spend its leisure in making plans for the capture of Spanish ports and speculating on the advantages to be got by seizing one. The letters of Pointer of the 'Speaker' prove that the officers were of

opinion that Cadiz with its unrigged fleet was a prize worth the employment of six or even ten thousand soldiers. Cromwell was not without hopes of seeing it taken by the ships alone. As early as April he wrote to the admirals, inquiring 'Whether now it might not be worthy to be weighed by you, and your council of war, whether this fleet of theirs [*i.e.*, the Spaniards] might not be burnt or otherwise destroyed? Whether Puntal and the forts are so considerably stronger as to discourage from such an attempt? Whether Cadiz itself be unattemptable; or the island on which it stands be noways to be separated from relieving the town by the bridge, the island being so narrow in some parts of it? Whether any other place be attemptable; especially that of the town and castle of Gibraltar,—which if possessed and made tenable by us, would it not be both an advantage to our trade and an annoyance to the Spaniard; and enable us without keeping so great a fleet on that coast, with six nimble frigates lodged there to do the Spaniard more harm than by a fleet, and ease our own charges?'

Unfortunately Cromwell was, in his own words, 'discoursing probabilities' too soon, though in a highly sagacious fashion. Cadiz might have been isolated from the Isla de Leon with ease, which is what is meant by the wrongheaded phrase about separating the island from relieving the town by the bridge, as Mr. Carlyle, reading with second sight, explains. It stands on the bowl of a spoon with a long narrow handle. To land on the handle, and so isolate the bowl, would have been easy enough for a body of troops, but it was useless to try it with sailors alone. For the same reason,

Cromwell's prophetic suggestion as to Gibraltar could not be acted on. Montague, who answered this letter for himself and his colleague, pointed out that with six thousand men either place could be taken with no great difficulty. It would not be necessary to besiege them in form, for the Spaniards notoriously never victualled a town for more than a month, and any force which could hold its ground for that time would have been sure of getting them by starvation. In the state of feebleness to which Spain had sunk, six thousand men would have been amply sufficient to occupy the neck of the peninsulas on which both Cadiz and Gibraltar stand. The fleet would have answered for preventing relief by sea; but without soldiers it was useless to attempt the enterprise. The events of the war of the Spanish Succession amply justified the caution of the admirals. Even then, when Spain was still feebler than in 1656, Ormond's attempt to rush Cadiz was repulsed by Villadarias and his 'rascally foot militia'. Rooke had a strong body of soldiers with him when he surprised Gibraltar; and better still, he caught the whole Spanish garrison hearing mass outside the walls when his men scrambled up the rock.

When it became clear that nothing could be done against the towns without more soldiers than could then be spared, and that the Spaniards were not coming to sea, it was decided in England to recall part of the fleet. Ten ships seem to have gone back in summer, and in August Cromwell ordered Montague home to consult, and Blake to remain with twenty ships on the coast. A certain margin of discretion was left to the admirals. They were authorised to modify their orders

if they saw a chance of doing any stroke of service immediately; but Cromwell made his own wishes perfectly clear, and Montague at least was hardly likely to go out of his way to find reasons for not complying with them. Just as the time came for him to return to England, a turn in the long ill-luck of the fleet enabled the admirals to combine a piece of effective service with punctual obedience to Cromwell's orders. In September the Plate ships turned up at last.

Whether through want of information, or by the rashness of their commander, or because the Court at Madrid was in such desperate want of money that they must needs run all hazards to supply it, or because they 'hoped their European coasts to find cleared from our ships by the autumnal wind,' eight of these galleons, with their priceless cargoes, came on from Santa Cruz. Even now they nearly slipped through the fingers of the blockading squadron. There is no better hiding place than the sea. In the finest weather a few miles of distance will conceal fleets from one another completely, and when there is a haze over the water, they may pass within hearing distance and never know it. It is one of the dramatic incidents of the great French Revolutionary wars, that Nelson crossed the track of Napoleon's fleet on its way to Egypt in the middle watch of one hazy night. He was so close to his chance of 'catching Boney on a wind' that the sound of the bells struck as fog signals on his ships was heard by the Frenchmen. They went on their way in nervous quiet, and by sunrise the fleets were out of sight of one another. The hard fate of the galleons was made harder by the fact that they had nearly been as fortunate as the squadron

and convoy of Admiral Brueys. On the night of September 8 they passed safely through the English fleet which would be stretched across the Straits. The reports of the action are as usual meagre and contradictory. According to one story, the Spaniards were chased by Stayner during the night, and attacked next morning. According to another, they were only sighted at daybreak, and might have escaped altogether if the flagship had not fired a salute when in sight of San Lucar, and so attracted attention.

This later version, which Waller may well have heard from Montague, is the more probable of the two. The galleons would naturally do what had been done formerly under the same circumstances. They would hug the north-east coast of Africa, which is often hazy, and is sometimes visited by fogs as dense as those of Newfoundland. Under the cover of this friendly shelter, they could get between the English ships and the shore of Morocco, reach the mouth of the Straits unseen, and then stand over to Cadiz. With this help or without, the eight treasure-ships arrived within sight of San Lucar de Barrameda unstopped. Their own coast was before them, a safe port at hand, and no English to be seen. Cadiz was only a few miles to the south-east, and right in front of them was the entrance to the Guadalquivir, the river of Seville. They might well think that the dangers of their long voyage were over, and fire a *feu de joie*. But at that very moment their fate came upon them. Stayner was in the immediate neighbourhood with his own ship the 'Speaker,' and the 'Bridgewater' and 'Plymouth' frigates. He either sighted the Spaniards or heard their salute, and bore down at once.

The engagement which followed was possibly one of those which Captain Lemuel Gulliver told to the King of Brobdingnag, and it was certainly marked by incidents calculated to help that humane monarch to make up his mind as to the merits of the 'most pernicious race of little odious vermin'. As a fight it was one-sided from the beginning. Stayner's three ships attacked the galleons furiously, apparently with quite as much wish to destroy as to capture. Outnumbered as they were by more than two to one, they routed their enemy with a very trifling loss. The Spaniards seem to have stuck to their guns pluckily, but want of discipline, bad gunnery, and perhaps the fact that their decks were hampered with cargo, left them at the mercy of their expert, alert, and hungry assailants. In a few hours most of the eight galleons had been sunk, burnt, taken, or driven on shore. Only two, or even only one, if all tales be true, escaped either into San Lucar or Puerto de Santa Maria, for they can hardly have got into Cadiz. The fate of the Capitana, as the Spaniards call the flagship, was especially cruel. She carried the Marquis of Badajos, who had been Viceroy of Mexico, and was returning home in command of the treasure fleet. The marquis had his family on board, and all the property he possessed in the world, for his family was one of the poorest among the Spanish nobility. When the 'Speaker' ranged up alongside him, the Spaniard fought his ship stoutly, but with no more success than his captains. In a short time the Capitana was on fire. It is to the honour of the unfortunate man that his enemies believed he fired her himself, to disappoint the English of their prize. He had probably no need

to commit this act of desperation, for the fire was only too likely to break out in a ship full of inflammable cargo, manned by seamen so careless as the Spaniards have always been, and particularly at a time when it was still the custom to bring gunpowder barrels on to the deck, and serve the powder out with a ladle. When the disaster had happened, the marquis did at least set an example not unbecoming a grandee of Spain. He refused to leave his ship, and remained to perish in her with his wife. Before the flames had gained the cabins, he threw his children into the water, in hope that they might cling to spars till picked up by the English boats. It is satisfactory to know that some of them were saved, and were treated with humanity by the captors. He himself met the horrible death he faced so manfully. Exactly sixteen years later, one of the English officers who helped to bring the Marquis of Badajos to his death, was man enough to follow his example. In 1672, during the disgraceful Dutch war, Montague, then Earl of Sandwich, was left alone on board his blazing flagship in Solebay, and he, too, chose to die where he was rather than desert his post.

The marquis could do no more than be beaten with honour. About one half of his convoy fell into Stayner's hands, and the captured galleons rewarded the English fleet for the weariness of the long blockade. They were a magnificent prize. Over and above the goods on board, which must have been of great value, no less a sum than 600,000*l.* was found in actual bullion. It was in coin and ingots of silver 'like sugar loaves' in shape. Montague himself had the pleasing task of carrying it home to Portsmouth, where it was loaded in waggons

and carried up to London. A guard of ten soldiers conducted the booty through the streets of Southwark to the Tower, where it was deposited till the Mint could turn it into coin. The silver does not seem to have reached England exactly as it was taken, for Montague himself had to report that there had been 'some miscarriages by the ships which did take the ships of Spain'. In plain English, some of the sailors had been drawing their share of prize-money in advance, not altogether without excuse, since the Government of the Protectorate, in its great need of money, was only too likely to follow the example set on a similar occasion by Elizabeth, and deal but indifferently with the captors of the welcome bullion. Their pilferings, as far as they did actually pilfer, cannot have been of any great importance. The bulk of the silver found its way to the Tower, and there were no such charges made against the admirals as were brought on only too solid evidence against Montague in the second Dutch war. In England he was received with the honours and praise to which he had no better right than Blake, and much less right than Stayner. He was thanked by the House and praised by Waller, who does not even name Blake or Stayner.

With these returns victorious Montagu,
With laurels in his hand, and half Peru.
Let the brave generals divide that bough,
Our great Protector hath such wreaths enow,
His conquering head has no more room for bays,
Then let it be as the glad nation prays.
Let the rich ore forthwith be melted down,
And the State fixed by making him a crown,

> With ermine clad and purple, let him hold
> A royal sceptre, made of Spanish gold.

Neither the Spanish gold nor the men who took it could fix the State in that way, but they did it very essential service. Six hundred thousand pounds was equal to at least one fourth of the yearly revenue of the Protectorate, and to get possession of that sum at once and in a lump, was a very sensible relief to its finances even when the prize-money due to the sailors had been deducted.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE.

The last year of Blake's life was spent in a blockade of Cadiz, broken by a swift cruise to the south-west, and one day of battle. On April 20 he made his attack on the Spaniards at Santa Cruz, and then returned to his cruising ground to wait for leave to come home. These twelve months were the most important to his fame in all his fourteen years of service by sea and land, for his last fight was also his greatest. If he had died in the beginning of 1656, he would still have left a reputation as a warrior second only to Cromwell's, but he would not have taken his place as the most intrepid and original chief who ever handled an English fleet till Sir Edward Hawke took his squadron into the rocks on the coast of Brittany. The defence of Taunton, the battles with Tromp and De Ruyter, the destruction of the pirate ships at Porto Farina, were great feats, but none of them so excited the admiration of his contemporaries, or have been so vividly remembered, as the attack on the Spaniards under the Peak of Tenerife. Even now, when the battles of the Nile and of Copenhagen are there to be compared with it, the action of Santa Cruz seems to deserve the almost hyperbolical language of Clarendon.

Blake was at all times most daring when he was

alone in command. He had had no colleague when he engaged a Dutch fleet twice as strong as his own off Dungeness, nor when he sailed into Tunis. He was unhampered again when news reached him off Cadiz that a fleet of sixteen treasure-ships had put into Santa Cruz, and were waiting in that place of supposed safety for a chance to run over to the coast of Spain. The Spanish governor and admiral were fully justified by their experience of naval war as it had been hitherto conducted, in believing that their charge was in absolute safety under the guns of their fortifications. Santa Cruz is a deep and narrow-mouthed bay. Forts had been built on both sides of the entrance and at several points of the shore. They were armed with the heaviest ordnance then in use, placed so as to bring a converging fire to bear on any squadron attempting to enter. With a fleet in the harbour, these could be reinforced by the ships' guns. It was small blame to the Spaniards if they thought that no man in his senses would expose his ships to such a fire as they could pour on any assailants. But the forts, guns, and ships were not the only defence of Santa Cruz. Before they could be attacked there was a natural obstacle to be overcome. 'The approach by sea to the anchoring place,' the words are Nelson's, 'is under very high land, passing three valleys; therefore the wind is either in from the sea, or squally with calms from the mountains.' A fleet designing to attack the anchorage must face the risk of finding itself becalmed within range of the guns of the forts. Even if the sea breeze took it in, there was always a danger that retreat would be impossible. The Spaniards had therefore good ground for trusting not only to their

strength but to the difficulty of getting at them, as sufficient defences against any enterprise on the part of the English fleet. Only a very modest estimate of their own gunnery could have caused them to feel the slightest doubt as to the consequences of an attack, and so much diffidence was not to be expected from your Don, a person notoriously 'altogether unparalleled in his own conceit'. The governor, Don Diego Diagues, is said to have been warned by some Dutch traders in the harbour that an attack would be made, and to have laughed at the warning, telling them to take themselves off if they were afraid. The Hollanders, who knew the intrepid character of Blake, were prudent enough to weigh and stand to sea before the English fleet sailed in. The tale has all the look of an embellishment invented to adorn the victory and give point to the daring of the adventure, but if the remonstrance was uttered, it would naturally be treated pretty much in this way.

The Spanish governor did find that Blake was mad enough to attack him. As is usually the case with the successfully daring operations of war, there was a large element of calculation in the admiral's apparent rashness. Nelson, who taught by example as well as by precept, was in the habit of saying that a sailor was never brave enough unless he was half mad, but then, he understood that there was to be method in the madness. No man ever estimated all the chances for or against success in any enterprise more carefully than Nelson himself, and what he called by the violent name of semi-insanity was that rapidity of execution which is the best of all kinds of secrecy, 'like the motion of a bullet in the air which flieth so swift as it outruns the

eye'. Blake did not tell the secrets of his craft to the world, like his great successor, but he must have calculated as every great captain has done. Looked at by a man who could judge coolly, and was not to be frightened by a brag countenance, the position of the Spaniards was much less strong than they imagined. Their fleet was anchored in two divisions. Ten small ships had been drawn close to the shore in a half-circle. Outside of them, and anchored with their broadsides to the sea, were the six great galleons. A glance must have shown Blake that by this arrangement the Spaniards had in fact masked the batteries at the bottom of the bay and the fire of the smaller ships. They could not use their guns without firing into their own countrymen. When the English were once in the bay, the fight would be with the six galleons mainly, and Stayner's action off San Lucar de Barrameda had shown how easily they could be mastered when resolutely tackled. The closer home the attack was pushed, the fewer would be the number of guns the Spaniards could use. It would be necessary to run the gauntlet of the castles at the mouth of the bay, but with regard to them also the closest place was the safest. When, once the English fleet was in, the guns of the forts which pointed seaward would be harmless. What was needed to make the attack possible was a combination of a good sea breeze with a flowing tide, and then the fleet could sweep in and do its work of destruction, trusting to the efficiency of its cannonade to beat down the fire of the castles before the ebb came to float it out. Blake must also have calculated, as he was well entitled to do, on the bad gunnery of the Spaniards.

Wind and tide suited on the morning of April 20, when Blake reached the bay and stood in at once under a press of canvas. The van division was led by Stayner, who had orders to attack the galleons while Blake himself directed the attack on the castles. The order of battle is not known, but the English ships must have entered the bay in line, and taken up their positions with the utmost precision Stayner's squadron must have come to the wind to bring themselves broadside to broadside with the galleons, and have then anchored by the head and stern to keep themselves steady. The supporting ships would anchor by the stern opposite the batteries, so as to cover the van and protect it from a raking fire. During four hours the battle raged chiefly with the galleons. On board the smaller ships and in many of the batteries, the Spanish gunners must have stood idle, watching the battle in the middle of the harbour as well as the clouds of smoke, rolled on shore by the sea breeze, would allow them. The unmasked batteries were swept by the fire of Blake's gunners. When the smoke lifted, it was because the six galleons had struck one after another. Then the English crews boarded and drove the Spaniards out, to swim on shore or drown on the way. For the moment this success only increased the danger of Blake's position. The Spaniards could now use all their guns with the certainty that they could only hit an enemy. The galleons would still screen the English ships, but the prize crews must have suffered heavily. It was found impossible to bring out the captured treasure-ships. Even if their sails were not unbent, as is very possible, and men enough could have been spared to get them

under weigh, which is barely credible, it would have been impossible to tack them out of the crowded bay against the sea breeze. Orders were given to fire them. When the flames had caught, the English, in the confidence of their proved superiority, fell on the small ships anchored under the forts, and fired them also. By this time the tide had begun to turn, and our fleet drifted out, leaving the sixteen galleons and pataches blazing in a great semicircle between them and the batteries. At this moment, heaven, as they believed, showed its favour for the servants of God who had turned the harbour of Antichrist into a pandemonium, and so dreadfully humbled his pride. The wind, which had blown steadily into the bay up to that moment, veered round when the fight was over, and began to blow equally steadily off the land. It was not squally with calms, from the mountains, but a strong even breeze before which the English fleet regained its station off Cadiz with ease. Blake's ships had shattered the forts, sunk the ships, and got free of the harbour before the wind turned, but its opportuneness and the trifling price paid for the victory went to make up the marvellous character of the fight. Their total loss in killed and wounded had been less than two hundred men. The loss of the Spaniards is said to have been frightful, and it is easy to believe that it was.

Since Gustavus Adolphus had routed Tilly at Breitenfeld, no battle had so startled the world as this. It was a revelation of what mighty things could be done by a well-handled fleet. Clarendon, who had to write much of brave men and brave fights, speaks of none of them as he does of the attack on Santa Cruz.

'The whole action was so miraculous, that all men who knew the place, wondered that any sober men, with what courage soever endued, would ever have undertaken it; and they could hardly persuade themselves to believe what they had done, whilst the Spaniards comforted themselves with the belief that they were devils and not men who had destroyed them in such a manner. So much a strong resolution of bold and courageous men can bring to pass, that no resistance and advantage of ground can disappoint them.' The fact that the victory was due largely to judicious calculation, and was materially helped by a lucky change of wind, does not in any way detract from the credit due to the victors for their mere courage. To be able to estimate the chances against him accurately, and to detect his enemy's weak spot, is the best proof the fighting man can give of his bravery, for it shows that no danger disturbs his thinking faculty. He ranks as a captain by the use he makes of his head, and in very many cases that has been to show that things formerly thought too dangerous to be risked, are much less perilous than they look. The attack on Santa Cruz was not the miraculous feat it seemed to people who considered only the material means at the disposal of the Spaniards. On the contrary, it was, as Blake proved, a very feasible piece of work indeed, when properly tried; but then a timid commander, or one who was bound by routine, would have reasoned like the rest of the world. He would have looked at the many guns of the Spaniards, and their strong position, and have left them alone. The best proof Blake gave in the course of his life that he was a great captain was his sagacity in judging that the

one half of the Spaniard's force would get in the way of the other in resisting an attack. He showed the strong resolution of a bold and courageous man by acting on his own opinion. A very exacting critic might point out that the victory was gained over an enemy far less courageous and skilful at their work than Blake's fleet, and that if the sixteen treasure-ships had been manned by Dutchmen commanded by Tromp, and the forts had been held by the soldiers of Maurice of Nassau, Blake might have sailed into the bay, but would never have gone out. The critic would probably be right, but a victory is not the less a victory, nor the less glorious and pleasant to remember, because it proves the great superiority of the victors in strength of moral fibre. Wellington manœuvred in one way before the Mahrattas, and in another against Massena, and yet Assaye was a glorious victory. The great leader by sea or land is just the man who adapts his means to his work, and makes the very utmost of his tools.

England, and Oliver who spoke for England, did not measure their praise to Blake. In June the Protector sent him 'a small jewel' of the value of 500*l.*, 'as a testimony of our own and the Parliament's good acceptance of your carriage in this action,' and with it a letter lauding his wisdom and conduct in the pious style of the time. In the country at large, then and since, this battle put Blake entirely apart among the officers of the Commonwealth. The others were always men of a party. Their valour and skill were devoted to a cause which was never accepted by the whole nation. Even the officers who commanded the English contingent at the battle of the Dunes were no exception, for to say

nothing of the fact that they met their own countrymen in the Spanish ranks, none of them left any great personal reputation. But all Englishmen, whether Royalist, Republican, or Cromwellian, could be proud of Santa Cruz. Hostility to Spain, both as the most bigoted of the Catholic powers, and as the nation which kept guard over the wealth of America, was an hereditary feeling. Whoever struck at the Spaniard struck at the enemy of England. When Blake gave him the greatest blow he had received since the capture of Cadiz, old cavaliers who had charged under Rupert were as well pleased as the Puritans who had stood by the admiral on the walls of Taunton. They accepted the victor of Santa Cruz as the true successor of Drake and of Raleigh, and were content to forget in what service he had fought his way to the command of the fleet.

The temptation to compare this brilliant piece of fighting with the disastrous affair of 1797 is strong, and particularly for a biographer of Blake, since Nelson has himself invited comparison by a somewhat disparaging reference to his predecessor. In point of fact, however, there is very little similarity between the two actions. When Nelson made the desperate night attack which failed so utterly, and which cost him his right arm, he had quite other work to do than Blake. His orders were to capture the treasure which had been landed, and to do that he must needs get possession of the town. Blake's object was the destruction of the ships in the harbour, and he had no occasion to meddle with Santa Cruz itself, beyond bombarding the forts. It is even hardly fair to make a comparison between the conduct

of the leaders, since Nelson was carrying out the orders of Earl St. Vincent, and could only do his best with the means given him. His fault, as far as there was any, consisted in this, that he had tried a work so difficult as to be nearly impossible, with a readiness which more than bordered on temerity. Given that the attempt had to be made, his plan was probably as good as it could be. If so many of his boats had not been shattered in the surf, if one detachment of his flotilla had not missed the Mole in the dark, if he had not been disabled by a wound early in the action, if the Spaniards had been taken by surprise, and if they had shown much less than their usual courage in defending their towns, Santa Cruz might have been taken. The defect of the scheme, the inevitable defect, was that it depended for success on so many 'ifs'. Blake's plan of battle needed only good seamanship and good gunnery to make it successful, and the turn of the wind at the end was only a little favour of fortune, grateful but not indispensable.

From Santa Cruz Blake returned to Cadiz, and remained there till he received leave to come home. His fighting was over, and his service was drawing to a close with his life. Between the end of April and the beginning of August he had some accounts to settle with the pirates of Sallee, but this was only a continuation of former work. There was the usual interchange of threats and promises. Little could be done against a port too shallow to admit large ships, and an enemy who did not even pretend to fight, but only lurked about in search of unarmed merchant vessels. The pirates made the promises they never failed to lavish

when in danger and break whenever they thought they could do it with safety.

During the summer months Blake's health grew rapidly so bad that he became incapable of doing the work of his squadron. His constitution had probably been weakened by the wound he received in the battle of Portland. When he landed at Walderswick after the battle of June, 1653, he was suffering from the gravel. Since then he had been in constant sea service, and when he sailed to the Canaries he had already been for one whole year on board, probably without landing at all. The inevitable consequences were beginning to appear. At that time, and for generations after, scurvy was rarely absent from ships engaged in long sea voyages. The treaty with Portugal made it possible for blockading ships to obtain fresh meat and fruit, but even with this occasional relief the health of the fleet was bad. Confinement, want of exercise, and want of wholesome food, acting on a constitution weakened by wounds and disease, did their work. When, in August, 1657, Blake at last received orders to bring home the ships which could not be subjected to the strain of another winter's blockade, he had been attacked by some form of scorbutic disease. To him as to Collingwood, the permission to revisit his native land came too late. The battered 'George' which carried his flag had barely entered the Channel before Blake knew that he should never see his house at Bridgewater again. Nothing is known of his deathbed beyond the fact that he expressed the wish to live long enough to reach the shore, and have some space left him in which to settle his estate. He died just two hours before the 'George,' with her consorts

the 'Newbury' and the 'Colchester,' cast anchor in Plymouth Sound.

The Government he had so well served showed his memory all due honour. 'He wanted,' in the characteristic words of Clarendon, 'no pomp of funeral when he was dead, Cromwell causing him to be brought up by land to London in all the state that could be; and to encourage his officers to venture their lives, that they might be pompously buried, he was, with all the solemnity possible and at the charge of the public, interr'd in Harry the Seventh's Chapel, among the monuments of the Kings.' It was necessary for the Royalist historian to find some more or less mean motive for every action of Cromwell's, and to attribute whatever was done in England to him alone. In truth, however, there was nothing exceptional in the funeral honours paid Blake, hardly even the place of his sepulchre. The ceremonies used were carefully copied from those employed at the funeral of Deane, who was slain in battle with the Dutch. The charge incurred was 550*l.*, which was very much less than the 'publick' was to be called on to pay for furnishing the apartments of Madam Carwell, and other persons who were disqualified not by sex only, for fighting Van Tromp or sinking Spanish fleets at Santa Cruz. When the bodies of the Commonwealth and Cromwellian leaders were removed from Henry the Seventh's Chapel, Blake's corpse suffered the same fate as those of his old comrades in arms. This, which is assuredly one of the least dignified incidents of the Restoration, has been the subject of a great deal of sufficiently frothy rhetoric. In itself, the measure was natural, and even inevitable. The restored monarchy

could scarcely be expected to allow the remains of men who had fought to beat down the Crown, and to keep it down, to repose among the monuments of the Kings. If it did a not unnatural thing in an unnecessarily brutal way, that, too, was in keeping with the manners of the time, and a part of the callous vulgarity which was the note of the Restoration in manners, government, and literature. There seems to be some doubt whether the body of Blake was thrown into a common grave with those of Deane. Ireton, and Cromwell, or given over to his family to be decently reinterred elsewhere. The subject is to my mind a most unsavoury one, and not worth investigating even if the evidence were to be got. It belongs for the rest to the lives of the men who fled before him when living, and not to the life of the great admiral and general at sea who wore his body out, fighting against the enemies of the human race and of England.

Blake died in possession of much such a modest fortune as he had inherited from his father. His will, drawn up on board the 'Naseby' in St. Helen's Road in 1656, contains a list of small legacies amounting in all to less than 3000*l.* of the money of that time. One sum of 50*l.* goes to 'the negro called Domingo, my servant, and is to be disposed of by my aforesaid nephew Captain Robert Blake, and Captain Thomas Adams, for his better education in the knowledge and fear of God'. There is also mention of a manor at Crandon-cum-Puriton, of houses in Bridgewater, and of 'all the rest of my goods and chattels,' which does not probably stand for any considerable amount. Two of the legacies, of 100*l.* each, are to the poor of his native town of

Bridgewater, and of his old government of Taunton. The gold chain given to him, as well as to Monk and Penn, at the end of the Dutch war, is left to his nephew, Captain Robert Blake. His services to the State were not productive of wealth to the admiral. It does not appear that he received any prize-money for the Plate ships taken in 1656, though at a later period his rank would have entitled him to a handsome sum. He was not one of those Parliamentary officers who were enriched by grants of confiscated land. The 500*l.* given him for the defence of Taunton, and the 1000*l.* voted after his return from the first cruise into the Mediterranean, represent all he gained over and above his 'pay and provend'. Like so many fighting men of that time, he had to complain with Dalgetty of the extreme irregularity of his paymasters. It is even stated by the editor of the Calendar of State Papers for 1657-58, that he was owed the sum of 3815*l.* 16*s.* for arrears of salary at the date of his death. When it is remembered that this sum is equivalent to about 15,000*l.* of our money, and represented several years' pay, it seems unlikely that the State was so heavily in his debt. The wording of the order for the payment of the sum on July 21, 1657, is consistent with the supposition that it was meant for the general service of his squadron, which was then about to come home, and must be paid off. Even, however, if he was punctually paid his salary, he gained little else in the way of worldly goods during the Civil War. Blake was not one of those sequestrators and committee men who built themselves up fortunes out of the plunder of the Royalists.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

In reporting the departure of the 'George,' 'Newbury,' and 'Colchester' from Plymouth with the admiral's body, Captain Henry Hatsell observes: 'I suppose he will have a very honourable interment, befitting a person of his worth, who indeed, setting some human frailties aside (from which the best of men are not free), may be ranked with most that have gone before him in our age'. If the captain had only recorded some of these same human frailties, we might have forgiven him for his platitude. If he had, it would have been easier to know what sort of man Robert Blake was. A series of actions do not make a biography, however long and brilliant it may be. Mr. Carlyle gave up his intention of writing a life of Montrose, because it was impossible to discover what the Royalist hero 'was really like'. The instinct of the great interpreter of character undoubtedly led him right, and yet, in mere bulk, the materials for the life of Montrose are abundant. Bulk is, however, the least merit of historical evidence. Ten lines of one of Cromwell's letters, or of Nelson's, are worth volumes of State papers and official reports, as helps towards realising the nature of the man. Contemporaries are

good witnesses when they have a share of Clarendon's faculty of character-drawing, or Boswell's power of making a man draw himself. When they have not—and it is unnecessary to point out how often that is the case—they are witnesses for very little, barely even for themselves. When no Clarendon or Boswell has been standing by, a man must paint himself, but the actors of conspicuous parts in history who could stamp their individuality on their every word and action, are nearly as rare as the great creative geniuses of literature.

Blake was a far less prominent figure in the great Civil War than Montrose, and proportionately less is known about him. We have Captain Hatsell's word for it that he was not one of those perfect men whom Mr. Carlyle found such a limited, uninteresting sort, but we have the general statement, and nothing more. In Ludlow's memoirs there is a mention of him which promises well, and then the same barrenness of detail. 'When I came to the House of Commons, I met Col. Rob. Blake, attending to be admitted, being chosen for Taunton; where having taken the usual oaths, we went into the House together, which I chose to do, assuring myself, he having been faithful and active in the publick service abroad, that we should be as unanimous in the carrying it on within those doors.' After this generality there is only one casual mention of his name. Faithful and active, stout and valiant, he was by the consent of all men, but a bundle of adjectives do not make an individuality.

Of the few stories told about him, not one can be shown to rest on thoroughly satisfactory evidence.

His patronising good nature to the Royalist trumpeter at Taunton is reported in a doggrel broadside. His rather contemptuous permission to the French captain in the Straits to go back to his ship and fight her if he could, and his vehement assertion of the rights of Englishmen at Malaga, are supported only by the authority of Whitelocke and Burnet. There is nothing incredible in any of the three. Even the release of the French captain may well be true, since, if the man's ship's company were resolved to fight, they could do it without him. Neither Blake's orders nor the character universally ascribed to him are consistent with the supposition that he would have committed the mean trick of getting the Frenchman on board on false pretences, and then attacking his ship without warning. That would have been much too like the heroic feat of the late Admiral Courbet at Foochow. A more famous and honourable story than any of the three can be proved to be absolutely false. It has been said that during the attack on Santa Cruz, Captain Benjamin Blake, a younger brother of the admiral's, was guilty of gross misconduct. His failure was known to his brother and commander. When the action was over, Blake insisted on bringing him to a court martial, and exerted his authority to overcome the reluctance of his captains to try the brother of their admiral. When the court brought in a very light sentence, Blake dismissed his offending brother from the squadron. It may be an open question whether it is more honourable for a man to behave with such stern impartiality as this, or never to have had a brother who showed the white feather, but Blake was never subjected to the trial. Captain

Benjamin was not in the fleet which attacked Santa Cruz. He did show a very mutinous disposition when acting as second in command under Goodson in the West Indies, and some vague reminiscence of this is probably the origin of the story, but in its popular form it is certainly untrue. However suspicious the best authenticated of these tales may be, they are, however, not quite without value as evidence of the character of Blake. We lend only to the rich, according to the well-known French proverb, and such anecdotes would hardly have been invented except about a leader who was both strictly honourable and magnanimously brave.

The very paucity of stories about Blake has a certain negative value as evidence. It is at least some proof of what he was not. It may be safely asserted that no man could have played so active a part as he did in the West, within earshot of Clarendon, or could have sat in Parliament during the stormy period of the second Civil War, by the side of Sir William Waller and Edmund Ludlow, and yet have never said or done anything which any of the three thought worth recording, if he had been either an active politician or a man of pronounced religious opinions. Only an exceedingly acute attack of what Macaulay called the lues Boswelliana (an inaccurate name for a not uncommon disease) could mislead any biographer into making of Blake a political leader of any mark. On the contrary, he was, throughout his whole Parliamentary career, a silent and voting member. It was not until the last century had begun, that anything was heard of his political opinions. In his own time it was written that 'as he lived, so he continued to the death, faithful'.

He was true to his party, and if his life has any political significance at all, it is because he was a very good specimen of those Englishmen who took up arms against the King, from a belief that he was not maintaining but stretching the royal power, who stood by the Independents from a fear that the Presbyterians would make a ruinous compromise, and who obeyed Cromwell on the ground that he was a truer representative of their cause than the little knot of pedantic Republicans who controlled the Rump. The mere fact that he was not one of the King's judges, and yet took service in the fleet under a commission from the Keepers of the Liberties of England, proves conclusively that he was not then considered as a man of much mark, and that he was known not to be opposed to the measure. The application of the same negative test to his religious opinions shows that he was one of the party with whom Puritanism was a matter of morals and conduct, rather than of dogma. We know the religious opinions of Massey and Skippon, and of many scores of obscure men who rose to the surface for a moment during that time of conflict. Of Blake it is only known that he cannot have belonged to any of the noisier sects of the time, and that he was so far an Independent as to sit on Cromwell's committee for settling the religious organisation of the country. His piety will be doubted only by those who hold the old doctrine that all the Puritans were hypocrites, who cut their hair short and snuffled through their noses. Now and again it is advanced even yet by writers officially described as dramatists. Sir Walter Scott, with whom they are said to be under the impression that they

agree, thought otherwise. In 'Woodstock,' one of the best of the second rank of his stories, he has not judged the King's enemies with undue favour, but he was incapable of the stupidity of thinking that the men who

> Could by industrious valour climb
> To ruin the great work of time,
> And cast the kingdoms old
> Into another mould,

were mere liars and mountebanks. 'It' (the Puritan) 'was, however, a cast of mind that formed men for great and manly actions, as it adopted principles, and that of an unselfish character, for the ruling motive, instead of the gratification of passion.' Whatever the religious opinions of Blake may have been, they certainly did not unfit him for great and manly actions.

Tradition of a more or less dubious character has preserved a few stories of the admiral's personal appearance and habits. It is known on the good authority of Wood, that he was short and thickset—the build of a born sailor—and much inferior witnesses have added that he was of a fair complexion and broadfaced. The account of his habits given in the 'History and Life' is to be accepted with great caution, but this much is to be said for it, that it is not inconsistent with what is known on undoubted authority. The writer, who professes to repeat the report of one who had known the admiral, describes him as possessing a character of the kind called solid. He was a man of few words and solitary habits. 'His look inclined rather to the stern than to the soft, and he never fell into any kind of drollery, yet would often be pleasant, and generally

affected to express his pleasantry in some Latin verse or saying, of which he had always the most proper *ad unguem*, being an excellent scholar as well as soldier.' This, if it is not an amplification, is a friendly version of the 'moroseness and fondness for the occasional society of good fellows' attributed to him by Clarendon. It would have been strange if a man who had been nine years at Oxford could not quote Latin in an age when it was in very familiar use. The rather feeble garrulity of the account is in favour of the honesty of the author, in saying that he was informed by one Thomas Bear, who had been the admiral's servant. There is no such person mentioned in the will, but an old servant would have tattled along very much in this fashion: 'General Blake pray'd himself aboard his ship, with such of his men as could be admitted to that duty with him, and the last thing he did after he had given his commands and word to his men in order to retire to his bed, was to pray with the aforementioned Mr. Bear. When that was over he was wont to say, "Thomas, bring me the pretty cup of sack," which he did, with a crust of bread; he would then sit down, and give Thomas liberty to do the same, and inquire what news he had of his Bridgewater men that day, and talk of the people and affairs of the place.' The valet is notoriously a poor judge of a hero, but the real or imaginary Mr. Thomas Bear had nothing belittling to tell of Blake. Beyond the pretty cup of sack, always taken 'with exemplary moderation,' and the interest taken in his townsmen, there is little in Mr. Bear's reminiscences which is not of the usual general character. That Blake was not given to the naval cursing and swearing common in the days of Commo-

dore Trunnion and later, may easily be believed about the Puritan. That he carried on his command without the bullying of Smollett's time and later, is not less credible of the admiral of a revolutionary Government which had to employ good treatment and improved pay to counteract old habits of loyalty to an exiled royal race.

On the whole, the Blake partially sketched by the dubious Mr. Thomas Bear has a striking air of verisimilitude. It is the portrait, as far as it goes, of a sober, solid, and laborious Englishman of the provincial middle class, patriotic and pious, with a wholesome indifference to theories, and with a practical faculty for managing business.

It was only as a fighting man that Blake can be said to have approached greatness in any rational sense of the word. As an admiral he gained a position which continued to be unrivalled until more than a century after his death. Whether such a life is as interesting as it is theoretically supposed to be, is perhaps doubtful. Certainly there is no class of men who play a smaller part in biography than admirals. Their greatness is taken for granted. Nelson is indeed an exception, but then he was an exception in so many respects, not the least important of them being that he found Southey for a biographer. The interest of his life, too, is largely independent of his great feats in battle. Das ewig Weibliche plays a very large part in his doings, and his famous saying, 'if there were more Emmas there would be more Nelsons,' is true in a sense he never meant the words to bear. Fortunately or not, no other

admiral has possessed in an equally eminent degree that power of going to the devil for a woman which Miss Crawley admired so much in 'the shaker of the Baltic and the Nile'. With the exception of this one, who will always be attractive to all who care for the study of character, by virtue of his colossal vanity, his strange mixture of heroism and childishness, his erratic generosity, and his furious passions, the admirals have, like other seamen, formed a nation by themselves. Generals may be, and often have been, eminent as statesmen and conspicuous in society. An admiral can hardly be. He must live at a distance from capital, and court, and politics. At best he sees them only at intervals, and his work is done under conditions which few understand. Neither are these conditions such as lead to much variety of character. The seaman was drawn once and for all by Clarendon. Even the genius of Southey, and the apparent interest of his subject, have not saved his lives of Frobisher, Cavendish, Drake, and Hawkins, admirably written as they are, and full of stirring tales of the sea, from falling into comparative obscurity. To read these things with pleasure one must possess a little of the happy faculty of Tartarin. The hero of Tarascon could, as everybody knows, so lose himself in reading of hunting and travel, that he forgot he was sitting in his summerhouse, and would rush to his stand of tomahawks and slay imaginary redskins. Tartarin was not so absurd as his malicious biographer has been pleased to describe him. Without a considerable share of his boyish love of reading about good fights, nobody can enjoy the naval side of the history of

England, which after all is not without its importance as a part of our national activity.

When Campbell linked the name of Blake with Nelson's, he did more than consult the exigencies of his metre. The two are very fit to be named together, for as the one did the very utmost that could be done with the old sailing fleet, and can never have a rival, the other was the first of the modern admirals. The Elizabethan seamen had been brilliant privateers, discoverers, and adventurers, but they were rather armed traders who were driven to fight, than naval officers. Blake was the servant of the State as much as Anson or Rodney. He was the first man to command the English fleet when it became a great and ubiquitous force. The distinction he gained in his office, and the vital service he rendered his country, were not mainly due to any intellectual qualities. As a pure strategist he cannot be said to have shown any great originality. Tromp was certainly, and his own subordinate Lawson was probably, his superior in this respect. Intrepidity of character is much more his note than skill. Clarendon's masterly portrait has been occasionally cavilled at, but, as is usually the case with this master-draftsman's handiwork, it is essentially true. 'He was the first man that declined the old track, and made it manifest that the science might be attained in less time than it was imagined; and despised those rules which had been long in practice, to keep his ship and his men out of danger, which had been held in former times a point of great ability and circumspection, as if the principal art requisite in the captain of a ship had been to be sure to come

home safe again. He was the first man who brought the ships to contemn castles on shore, which had been thought ever very formidable, and were discovered by him to make a noise only, and to fright those who could rarely be hurt by them. He was the first that infused that proportion of courage into the seamen, by making them see by experience what mighty things they could do if they were resolved, and taught them to fight in fire as well as upon water, and though he hath been very well imitated and followed, he was the first that gave the example of that kind of naval courage and bold and resolute achievements.'

It is easy enough to pick holes in this sketch, but whoever thinks he can better Clarendon will generally find that he is repeating the same judgment in tamer words. When Blake took the advice of his council of officers, and fought off Dungeness; when he accepted battle with Tromp in the Channel, though he had only twelve ships by him, and so checked the progress of the Dutch fleet until his own supports could come up; when he attacked Porto Farina without orders, and when he sailed into Santa Cruz, what he showed was above all things intrepidity. There was calculation and good management, but they were less conspicuous than undaunted courage. If he added nothing to the naval science of his age, he showed the utmost that could be done, with the navy as it was, by men who were prepared to dare all.

To speak of him as a great man, as one who stood over against Oliver Cromwell, would be mere biographer's midsummer madness. At the best he came

as near as any man of his time to being as tall as the hilt of the Protector's sword. But he left a character without a stain; he rendered great services to England; he set an example which hath been very well imitated and followed, and that is more than enough to entitle him to the name of Worthy.

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